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THE USE OF PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN AS A
PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

by

IGOR JASINSKI

Montclair State University

Upper Montclair, NJ

2017

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Mark Weinstein

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

THE USE OF PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN AS A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN AS A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

by Igor Jasinski

In my dissertation, I advance an argument for a non-directional conceptualization of philosophy with children as a pedagogical practice. Drawing from the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, I argue that engaging students in philosophical dialogue, conceived as a communal experimentation with concepts, allows for the experience of what Agamben calls *infancy*—an ontological state of openness toward new ways of speaking and thinking. Rather than being directed at specific goals or outcomes, the practice of philosophy (thus conceived), I argue, should be seen as a paradigm for an educational (as well as social, and political) form of life, aimed at individual and communal well-being.

I begin my argument by showing how infancy is an integral aspect of historical conceptions of the practice of philosophy (Socratic Philosophy, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Phenomenology). I then demonstrate how the notion of infancy is also contained in contemporary conceptions of education that seek to redeem the idea underlying progressive education (and that of Dewey, in particular) that education needs to be rooted in experience. Tracing the notion of infancy in the work of John Dewey, Ivan Illich, Hannah Arendt, Gert Biesta, Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, Jacques Rancière, and Tyson Lewis, I conclude that the practice of philosophy is uniquely able to allow for the kind of experience that these scholars consider central to education: An experience that is valuable in itself, while also pointing—in a weakly utopian gesture—beyond the

given. I go on to demarcate the compatibility of the idea of infancy with existing conceptions of philosophy with children. I then develop in detail what a practice of philosophy with children based on infancy (*Philosophy for Infancy*, or *P4I*) looks like at the level of the classroom, and what makes its inclusion in the curriculum both suitable and desirable. I conclude with an exploration of the *use* of the practice of philosophy for infancy as a pedagogical practice, in the school as a whole, and in society—considering its role in a number of conceptions of society: Dewey’s *Great Community*, Rorty’s *Liberal Utopia*, and Agamben’s *Coming Community*.

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The Use of Philosophy with Children as a Pedagogical Practice

Chapter 1: Introduction

In her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), philosopher Martha Nussbaum speaks of the current state of education as one of a “crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance” (2010, p. 1). For her, education has become primarily a tool of economic growth, resulting in an erosion of the humanities and the arts as they are seen by policy-makers as “useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market” (ibid., p. 2). A similar assessment of the influence of the economy on education can be found in the work of critical theorists Stephen J. Ball (2012) and Joel Spring (2009; 2015), who speak of the increasing economization and corporatization of education, worldwide. At the national level, this trend is reflected in the major educational policy initiatives of the last four decades, from “A Nation at Risk” (1983), to “No child left behind” (2002), to “Race to the Top” (2009), as well as the recent implementation of the “Common Core Standards,” that show an increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing, accountability, and standardization, driven by the primary concern for economic success and global competitiveness.¹

The issue here is not that education shouldn’t *also* prepare students for economic success, or ensure a qualified workforce, but that it is wrong to assume that education for

¹ In a speech introducing the “Race to the Top-”initiative, for example, Obama stated: “In an economy where knowledge is the most valuable commodity a person and a country have to offer, the best jobs will go to the best educated ... In a world where countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, the future belongs to the nation that best educates its people. ... It is about whether they [students] possess basic knowledge and essential skills like problem-solving and creative thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship” (Obama, 2009).

material success *alone* could prepare students for meaningful and fulfilling lives, or that a strong national economy would automatically promote public goods (Gregory, 2011).

This view of the role of education is especially problematic because it tends to be presented as purely pragmatic (non-ideological/value-free) while hiding its reductionist and politically conservative nature. Reductive, because it is based on a (crudely) materialistic idea of human nature, and conservative, because it is designed to perpetuate an inherently inequitable and stratified system by promoting an impoverished idea of education for the masses, while providing the children of the moneyed elites with the kind of education that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011) that makes sure they come out on top.² On a broader social scale, the trend towards an economization and commodification of education is mirrored by the learning society, that demands the continuous acquisition of new knowledge and skills to stay competitive and marketable (Masschelein et al, 2007). In short, we are faced with a general trend toward an instrumentalization and impoverishment of education throughout society, driven by the dictates of the economy.³

This kind of critique is of course not new, and Nussbaum stands here in a long tradition of philosophers and educational theorists (going back to at least Socrates) who

² A propos here: Alan C. Jones, “Mr. Obama: Most Schools Aren’t Like Your Daughters’ School” (*Education Week*, published on January 22, 2013).

³ For the connection between economic interests and education, and the idea of education as human-capital development, in particular, see Pierce (2013), and Means (2011; 2014). Means, for example, speaks of the need to “decenter the reductive notion of contemporary educational debates,” that “imagines students and schools solely in terms of their economic functions” by opposing “corporate school reform for human capital development and its emphasis on privatization, standardization, control, punishment, and testing” (Means, 2014, p. 11). For a broader socio-political perspective, see also Peter McLaren (2000), Wendy Brown (2005), and Henry Giroux (2005).

have demanded that life (and, thus, education) be about more than socio-economic advancement. In traditional conceptions of education, this “more than” has consisted in educational goals or ideals such as: beholding the idea of the good (Plato), the realization of our nature as rational beings (Kant), or our self-realization in accordance with the universal spirit (Hegel). What we might call post-traditional (or, non-foundational) theories of education, on the other hand, have focused on pedagogical practices (i.e., procedural, rather than substantive goals) as a way to move beyond the status quo, and toward a better, and more humane society. Critical pedagogues such as Paolo Freire (and, more recently, Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux) for example, have emphasized the emancipatory and transformative power of dialogic practices, while postmodern theorists, following Foucault (1977), have advocated pedagogies that develop students’ ability to identify, expose, and disrupt established structures of power, inequality, and oppression. Nussbaum herself, finally, whose views align broadly with the critical thinking tradition going back to Dewey (and beyond that, to enlightenment ideas and classical philosophy), believes that education should be about “imaginative and critical self-development” (2012, p. 4) that she considers essential for life in a democratic society.

In my dissertation, I argue that philosophy with children is uniquely positioned among such efforts to counter-act the current outcome-driven educational paradigm. Rather than seeing it primarily as a type of pedagogy (directed at the development of skills or competencies), I believe that its unique value within the curriculum consists in allowing for a certain kind of experience that is, by itself, inherently educational. As I will try to show, the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, and his notion of

infancy, in particular, provides us with the conceptual tools to articulate the educational value (or *use*) of the kind of experience that is made possible by the practice of philosophy. Rather than merely proposing a different conceptualization of philosophy with children and adolescents, an Agambenian perspective allows us to see the practice of philosophy as a paradigm for a different idea of education, and, thus, for a different idea of society.

While the current educational climate (at least in the US) may not be favorable to the inclusion of philosophy as a pedagogical practice in the K-12 curriculum (no matter how it is conceived), it seems all the more important to articulate as clearly as possible what the unique value of this practice may be, in order to—if nothing else—throw into relief how unimaginative, and limited (as well as limiting) the currently dominant educational paradigm really is.

1.1. Motivation

The motivation for this dissertation stems from my experience of doing philosophy with high school and middle school students. Moving from a more traditional way of teaching philosophy at the high school level, to a P4C-approach with groups of 6th-grade students, I found myself becoming less and less involved in the facilitation of the process, to a point where my practice was no longer supported by the idea, underlying the traditional P4C-approach, of moving the conversation toward increasingly reasonable speech. While I continued to use some of the basic procedural components of P4C-pedagogy (familiarizing students with the nature of philosophical questions, establishing procedural/disciplinary rules, using prompts to generate questions, etc.), I virtually

stopped intervening in the community of inquiry component that forms the pedagogical heart of the original P4C-approach. Since it appeared to be precisely the lack of facilitation that accounted for the particular quality of the experience, I was confronted with the question of how a practice that is not aimed at actively developing students' knowledge or abilities (thus, lacking the kind of directionality commonly associated with educational activities) could still be thought of as educationally valuable. To a significant degree, this dissertation is driven by my desire to understand, and articulate, the educational value of philosophy, as a practice that is not only not directed at specific goals or outcomes, but is *defined* by not being directed at specific goals or outcomes.

1.2. Methodology

While this dissertation is largely theoretical in nature, the fact that my argument is motivated by, and grounded in, my own practice, makes it necessary to not only reflect on the methods used to organize and discuss the literature, but to also make explicit the ontological and epistemological commitments that underlie my understanding of educational practice. Among current positions in both educational theory and methodology, the one that best reflects my own views, is a phenomenological perspective, based on the work of Copei (1966), Bollnow (1989), and van Manen (1990; 1991; 2007; 2008), and, with regard to methodology used in educational research, a phenomenological qualitative approach found in the work of van Manen (1990), Moustakas (1994), and Friesen et al (2012).⁴ In addition to making explicit the general

⁴ References to qualitative phenomenological research in this section are meant to locate this investigation within the larger context of current educational research. Phenomenology as a research method is unique, insofar as it could be seen as a foundation for qualitative research methodology as a whole (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 2009), given that the defining features of qualitative research are thick descriptions of distinctly

assumptions that have motivated and guided this investigation, the following reflections are also meant to provide a methodological basis for those parts of the dissertation (e.g., the first chapter) that use a—broadly—phenomenological approach to describe and evaluate my practice. These reflections are followed by an account of the theoretical methodology used for the discussion of the literature.

One of the key assumptions underlying a phenomenological perspective on educational practice, and educational research, is that phenomenology doesn't assume an observer or mind-independent reality that can be described in objective terms. This means that a phenomenon can be anything that our intentionality is directed at, whether it is imagined, perceived, or remembered (van Manen, 1990, p. 182). It also means that our *description* of what is happening in the classroom does itself play a crucial role in determining (affecting/shaping) what we *perceive* to be happening in the classroom. It is for this reason that, for the qualitative phenomenological researcher, “thick” description is a more suitable tool for capturing a wide range of potentially relevant phenomena than the collection of quantifiable and measurable data. This is the case, not only because (thick) description is a better tool for capturing what is *actually* happening, but—given that phenomenology doesn't assume an observer or mind-independent reality that can be described in objective terms—because our description is seen as a way to first make phenomena available to us by articulating what we experience at a pre-conceptual (or, not yet fully conceptualized) level. In other words, given that the process of articulation is

human phenomena, the acknowledgment of subjective data collection, and the search for shared meaning in human experience (Moustakas, 1994). See also: Fisherman, D. and Jasinski, I., *Qualitative Phenomenological Research and Its Philosophical Foundations*. (2013). Un-published manuscript.

itself an essential part of letting the phenomena appear as they appear to us, our description of what is happening in the classroom, *is*, to a certain extent, what is happening in the classroom. This openness with regard to both, the phenomena, on the one hand, and their articulation, on the other, is also what accounts for the possibility of any new or different ways of describing what we *experience* as happening in the classroom, as well as what we think could or should be happening in the classroom. Applied to this investigation, we could say that what I am attempting to do is to engage in a process of articulation of what it means to do philosophy with children (what it is, can, and should be)—staying as open as possible to both the phenomena (my experience of different ways of doing philosophy), and to possible ways of their articulation (my own available vocabulary and that found in the consulted literature).

In addition to an assumption of a radical openness toward the phenomena in phenomenology, there is also an acknowledgment of the impossibility of neutrality (lack of bias) when it comes to the description of phenomena. In other words, while we can try to stay as open as possible to the phenomena, who I (as a particular person, with certain physical, linguistic, and cultural particularities) am, is a crucial factor in both how phenomena appear to me, and how I chose to articulate them. This is no less true for the educational scholar (as he or she interprets and evaluates theoretical arguments), as it is for the researcher or the classroom teacher. While some approaches in phenomenological research (based on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology) see it as the task of the researcher to use certain techniques (e.g., *epoché*, and *bracketing*) to minimize the subjective factor, and arrive at a more objective description of the essence of the

experience of certain phenomena (i.e., how they, presumably, are *in themselves*), my own view aligns, instead, more closely with that of hermeneutic phenomenologists (Friesen et al, 2012; van Manen, 2007). Rather than trying to get to a more faithful description of an optimal givenness or essence of phenomena, hermeneutic phenomenologists hold that there is no such thing as an essential or originary way in which phenomena could be given. This is because the objects of our investigation are seen as having always already been understood in a particular way, meaning that all we can do is to explicate the manner in which they have been understood. Heidegger, for example, writes: “Any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted” (2008, p. 194). For him, the interpretive, or hermeneutic process is constant and has neither a beginning nor an end, and it is not possible to arrive at any kind of essence that would in some way exist outside of this ongoing process of interpretation (see also van Manen, 1990; 1991). So rather than trying to attain objective essence, researchers doing hermeneutic phenomenology aim at describing the lived experience of everybody involved in the research process within the context of a particular historical, cultural context, without claiming any kind of objectivity (Dowling, 2007, p. 138). And Friesen et al write: “[T]his type of phenomenology is open to revision and reinterpretation: it is about an openness to meaning and to possible experiences,” and “it rejects any ‘transcendental’ claim to meaning or any research conclusions that are fixed once and for all” (Friesen et al, 2012, p. 1). This perspective is important with regard to the kind of claim I am making: Rather than claiming to explain what is *actually* happening or should be happening in the classroom, I am merely offering a description of

what I have perceived as happening when I do philosophy with children, and what about this experience I have come to see as valuable—with the hope that my ideas will resonate with and be compelling to others.

One last aspect of a phenomenological perspective on the classroom to be mentioned is the acknowledgment of our embodiment/corporality and its role in the way we perceive and experience ourselves, and others, as being in the world. This idea, going back to Merleau-Ponty (2013), is significant for this investigation, insofar as it allows for a consideration of the full spectrum of expressions—including those that are happening at a pre-reflective, pre-conscious level (e.g., movements, gestures, vocalizations, and silences) and that go beyond the conscious/reflective and discursive dimension of the classroom (see, for example, O’Loughlin, 2006; Bonnett, 2007). Providing a conceptual basis for the potential relevance of what could be thought of as an ontologically more basic dimension of experience is important for my argument, insofar as it acknowledges the possibly significant role of experiential states for the description and evaluation of educational practices that are not directed at specific goals or outcomes (Juuso & Laine, 2005).

In terms of the organization and discussion of the literature (that is, the specifically theoretical aspect of my methodology), finally, I am adopting an Agambenian methodology that is based on the use of *paradigms* in conceptual research (Agamben, 2010). Such a methodology can be understood as part of contemporary efforts to define the unique nature of philosophical research in educational theory (Ruitenberg, 2010; Fulford and Hodgson, 2016). Such efforts seek to articulate the specific “modes of

thought and discursive operations” employed by educational philosophers, without, therefore, “submitting to the “paradigms and expectations of the social sciences—especially the emphasis on ‘data’, technique and the tripartite breakdown of method into data gathering, data analysis and data representation” (Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 2-3). More specifically, I am adopting, in the theoretical parts of the dissertation, the method of what Agamben calls *paradigmatology* (2009). What this method entails, is the use of paradigms (such as Agamben’s use, in his own work, of *Homo Sacer*, the *Muselmann*, or the *state of exception*), to “make intelligible series of phenomena whose kinship had eluded or could elude the historian’s gaze” (ibid., p. 31). But rather than thinking of this method as historical (in the sense of using a particular concept to show connections between established historical phenomena/facts), Agamben refers to it as a kind of archeology. And “archeology,” for him, “is always a paradigmatology,” in the sense that the task of the inquirer consists in “the capacity to recognize and articulate paradigms,” as in “his or her ability to examine [for example] the documents of an archive” (ibid., p. 33). This method is neither inductive (from the particular to the universal), nor deductive (from the universal to the particular), but rather, as the term para-digm (from Greek *para*, besides, and *deiknynai*, to show) indicates, moves from the particular to the particular (ibid., p. 11). What I do then, is to use infancy as a paradigm, by placing it besides conceptions of the practice of philosophy and education, to make the phenomena (here, ideas found in the literature) intelligible, by showing their “kinship” to each other, in relation to the idea of infancy.

In addition to Agamben himself, I draw from the application of his methodology to educational theory (Lewis, 2011; 2013; Shapiro, 2014). For Shapiro, for example, a paradigm “exposes dynamic analogies among singularities,” creating a “paradigmatic relation [that] is never reified, but open to a multiplicity of engagements with singular objects, phenomena, practices, and ideas” (2014, p. 159). The paradigmatic relation, he writes,

poses, or ex-poses, intelligibility, not through an interpretation of preexisting phenomena or of pre-understandings, but by placing the example [or paradigm] alongside a class of phenomena or figures that it simultaneously constitutes. ... And it is this positioning that exposes a new set of relations as yet unseen or unknown. (Ibid., p. 161)

Applying this terminology to my purposes, this means that I place the idea of infancy alongside phenomena or figures contained in the philosophical and educational literature, in order to allow new aspects of the literature to emerge. The various manifestations of infancy in the literature, in turn, serve as a way to make intelligible and give further meaning to the idea of infancy.

1.3. Goals of the Dissertation and Outline of the Argument

Put in the briefest possible way, the goal of this dissertation is to show how Agamben’s notion of *infancy* allows us to articulate the unique value (or *use*) of philosophy as a pedagogical practice. The experience of infancy, I argue, is both a defining feature of the practice of philosophy and, what accounts for the unique educational value of engaging in this practice with children and adolescents in the

classroom. Staying true to the epistemological and ontological commitments outlined in the Methodology section, I begin my argument with a phenomenological account of my various experiences of engaging in philosophy in an educational context, both as student and teacher, and what prompted me, in my own teaching, to use a modified version of the original P4C-approach that preserved some of the procedural elements of the latter but lacks teacher facilitation during the inquiry-component. In addition to creating a context for my argument, the consideration of variations in the quality of experience between different ways of doing philosophy reflects one of the main assumptions underlying this investigation that experience is directly relevant to what makes an educational practice valuable.

Taking a first step towards articulating how an experience that is not directed at specific outcomes might, nevertheless, be considered educationally valuable, I look at the notion of “wait-time” (Rowe, 1987), as an example of the possibly beneficial effects of moments of silence, on the part of the teacher. While in the case of “wait-time,” the silence of the teacher is mainly seen as a pedagogical tool, the discussion of this phenomenon and its effect on the experience of the students, I argue, points to a significance beyond the pedagogical.

To articulate what the significance of the silence of the voice of the teacher beyond the pedagogical may consist in, I introduce Agamben’s notion of *impotentiality*. For Agamben, potentiality, properly understood, consists in the capability not only to do, but also to not-do, represented by the “im” in “impotentiality.” To avoid the impression that *impotentiality* is simply the opposite of potentiality, rather than potentiality that

retains that which is not actualized, I will hereafter render the term as “im-potentiality.”

What the notion of im-potentiality allows me to do is to describe the lack of facilitation in my practice not merely as an *inaction*, or *incapacity*, but as an expression of a capability—the capability, in this case of the teacher, to teach and to not-teach. Since learning (according to the common logic of education) is inextricably tied to teaching, even a temporary absence of teaching is perceived by students as a lack of learning, which allows for an experience of their capability (*qua* students) to not-learn. What is created by such a perceived lack of learning, I argue, is an experience that, besides being used as a tool to achieve certain educational outcomes (as in the case of “wait time”), is valuable because of the particular quality of the experience that is made possible by the silence of the teacher.

After this initial exploration of the experience of doing philosophy with students in an educational setting, I turn to the question of the particular nature of the experience of doing philosophy and its value—independent of its value for education, to which I will return later. I draw here, again, from the work of Agamben, showing how, for him, the practice of philosophy is defined by a particular kind of im-potentiality, namely the im-potentiality of language, or, what he calls *infancy*. Summarizing, we could say that, for Agamben, *infancy* is the defining feature of human beings (as beings that have language), and that, for him, philosophy allows us to more fully realize this particular aspect of our humanity.

To understand what exactly Agamben means by *infancy*, and why it plays such an important role in his work, we need to look at two dimensions that are implied in the way

in which he uses the term. First of all, there is the common use of *infancy*, as a stage in the development of a particular human being. In contrast to the term childhood, whose etymological roots go back to the act of being born (from Old English *cild* "fetus, unborn or newly born person"), the term infancy (literally, not-speaking, from Latin, *in-*, not, and *fari*, to speak) refers to the fact that the young child is (yet) unable, or only incompletely able, to speak, with the underlying assumption that the ability to speak is the defining feature of a fully-developed human. The second dimension of the term is also developmental, but refers to the development of the ability to speak in the genesis of the species, that is, of what could be called the "infancy of humankind." Lastly, and most importantly, Agamben uses *infancy* to refer to a transitional (liminal, borderline) state between not-language and language that, for him, is present in every act of speech or language (*acto linguistico*)—an experiential state where there is no longer just voice, but not yet meaningful words, and where the two (not-language, and language) are indistinguishable.

The idea of in-fancy (hereafter used in this hyphenated form, to emphasis the fact that it refers to an experience of both not-language *and* language), is based on some very basic, and relatively uncontentious assumptions: Firstly, there is the fact that we have language; that we can speak (2007, p. 6); secondly, that language is not all there is, meaning, that experience always consists in more than just language; and, thirdly, that part of our experience of speaking/using language is that the words we use are not predetermined, but are formed out of (based on) a mix of linguistic and non-linguistic

aspects of our experience.⁵ Depending on the situation, our range of linguistic expression may be limited (e.g., responding to a specific question, such as “Is it raining?” or “What time is it?”), but even in those cases, there are different ways of formulating our response (in terms of wording, intonation, etc.). And the more complex the idea we are trying to express, the more pronounced is this experience. For example, the ideas contained in this text could be expressed in many different ways, and the struggle for an adequate linguistic presentation, chosen from a virtually infinite number of possible articulations, might be seen as the very essence of the task of producing a scholarly text. While the experience of in-fancy may be more pronounced in such forms of writing, it is—according to Agamben—found in any kind of linguistic expression, however mundane, as the constitutive feature of human language (what makes it possible at all).

The reason it is so important for Agamben to preserve the ability to fully experience this liminal state (between pure voice and words) is that, for him, the experience of indeterminacy allows for, and keeps open, the possibility of new and different ways of speaking. This, for him, is crucial, both in positive terms, as a source of enjoyment (and, ultimately, a form of well-being or happiness), and, in critical terms, as a way to prevent speech (and, thus, thoughts and actions) from becoming normalized/petrified, and, thus, potentiality, dogmatic. While, for Agamben, the

⁵ Shapiro summarizes the idea of experience being about more than just language, in the following way: “Much of Agamben’s writing seeks to extricate us from Western thought’s presupposition that language and conceptual frameworks can encompass, subsume, and structure actual experience. Thus, he articulates qualities of experience like “infancy,” “potentiality,” “pure mediality,” and “whatever being” that expose this eclipse of experience and that reveal something more than our language and categories can name. For Agamben, there is no meaningless, chaotic abyss that lies beneath language. But there is much more than language” (Shapiro, 2014, p. 160).

experience of in-fancy is always present in speech, it is only when it is allowed to be fully realized (as a way of being, a form of life) that language can play this role. For Agamben, this also makes it the source of whatever freedom is possible for human beings, and, thus, a defining feature of our humanity.⁶

For Agamben, the experience of in-fancy is also the defining feature of the use of the practice of philosophy. While specific references to philosophy are relatively sparse in Agamben's work, they tend to occur at strategically important points.⁷ In *Potentialities* (1999), for example, he writes that the task of philosophy is "to see and to expose the limits of language," asking: "Can there be a discourse that, without being a metalanguage or sinking into the unsayable, says language itself and exposes its limits?" (ibid., p. 46), or that "philosophy is ... the construction of an experience of the possible as such" (ibid., p. 249).

To show that the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy can be generalized, I trace it in four prominent conceptions of the practice of philosophy: Socratic philosophy, the works of Nietzsche and Dewey, and in the Phenomenological tradition. With regard to a Socratic model of the practice of philosophy, I argue, infancy can found in the idea of the contingency of language (and truth), made possible by a communal "experimentation with concepts" (Hampe, 2014, p. 65). In Nietzsche's work, it is reflected in the idea that the task of the philosopher is to

⁶ Insofar as this implies a concept of human nature at all, it could be said to consist in the fact that human beings do not have a particular nature, because "there is," according to Agamben, "no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize" (Giorgio Agamben. 1993, p. 43).

⁷ An exception in this regard is a recent, not yet translated, book, entitled "*What is Philosophy?*" that is specifically dedicated to the topic. See. Agamben, G. (2016). *Che cos'è la filosofia?* Macerata: Quodlibet.

engage in an examination and revaluation of concepts and values, based on the conventionality of language (and truth). The idea of infancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy is also present in Dewey's notion of the "experience of an empirical unity of opposites" (Dewey, 2008; see also Garrison, 1985), and the prominent use of the concept of "experience" in his work, more generally (1987, 1997, 2008).⁸

While Dewey does not place much emphasis on language, his idea of experience as a unity of opposites resembles Agamben's idea of in-fancy, insofar as it consists in a state of indistinguishability between "the fixed and the unpredictably novel," and, insofar as Dewey sees it as an important, if not defining, feature of the practice of philosophy, and as essential for the realization of a defining aspect of our humanity.⁹ Lastly, I propose that a phenomenological view of the practice of philosophy contains the idea of in-fancy, insofar as it emphasizes the need for a radical openness to both the phenomena and possible ways of their articulation, made possible by dwelling in a state between the phenomena (not-language) and our articulation of the phenomena (language)—a state that could be described, in Agambenian terms, as an experience of the limits of language and communicability, as such.

⁸ So when he writes that (true) experience (i.e., that of the unity of opposites), is an "intricate mixture of the stable and the precarious, the fixed and the unpredictably novel, the assured and the uncertain, in existence which sets mankind upon that love of wisdom which forms philosophy" (Dewey, 2008, p. 55). While, as mentioned, this idea is expressed primarily in non-linguistic (naturalistic) terms, there are passages in *Experience and Nature* that suggest that Dewey himself may have conceived of this idea as, at least also, in relation to language (see *ibid.*, pp. 132ff.).

⁹ In "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us" (1988), he speaks, for example, of the importance, for democracy, of the "process of experience," over "any special result attained," and how "[a]ll ends and values that are cut off from the ongoing process become arrests, fixations," striving to "fixate what has been gained instead of using it to open the road and point the way to new and better experiences" (1988: p. 229).

In all these examples of conceptions of the practice of philosophy, it is the particular kind of experience that is afforded by the practice (rather than a specific outcome) that accounts for its value. This view of the practice of philosophy can be generalized, to the extent that an experience of in-fancy (as a pre-requisite for the possibility of new ways of speaking) can be regarded as a necessary requirement of the *practice* of philosophy—independent of whether the practice is seen as valuable by itself, or whether it is valued for any results it may yield (e.g., a doctrine based on assertions about the world). In other words, using these examples from the Western philosophical tradition is a way to both, support the idea of the experience of in-fancy as the defining feature of the practice of philosophy, and to support this particular non-doctrinal trend within the philosophical tradition.¹⁰

Having established in what sense the experience of in-fancy can be seen as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy, and what might account for its value (or use), I go on to demonstrate that the experience of in-fancy is also contained in conceptions of education. What this allows me to do is to argue that, if the experience of in-fancy is something that has been described as valuable in education, and the practice of philosophy can bring about this experience, then the practice of philosophy should also

¹⁰ See also Kohan (2012), who writes: “One might differentiate between two dimensions of philosophy: the process and the product, verb and noun. ... The product is constituted in the powerful discursive constructs of iconic texts, well-established institutions, and preferred methods, built up at least since the pre-Socratics into what is called the Western philosophical tradition. ... But experience itself has to do mainly with the verb and the process. ... as experience, philosophy is the movement through which thinking enters a path along which there is no opportunity to return to the point of departure. It entails a kind of radical affectivity, in that our truths and fixed points are disturbed, problematized, questioned. New rules are needed, and a new relation to truth emerges” (2012, p. 177).

be considered as valuable for education. More specifically, I show that the notion of in-fancy is able to make intelligible (and, thus, redeem) the idea underlying progressive education that education should be rooted in experience. John Dewey's use of the concept of experience, in particular, can be seen as a struggle to reconcile the role of pure experience in education (which, for him, is also a crucial feature of the lives of adult citizens in a democratic society), with the idea that experience in education needs to allow students to transcend the given to be considered educational at all. The concept of in-fancy, I argue, allows us to understand, and reconcile this apparent paradox.

Having taken a first step in this direction, I go on to show how the idea of in-fancy enables us to see a similar struggle to reconcile pure experience (immanence) and the need for experience to be directed toward something beyond the given (transcendence) in post-Deweyan conceptions of education (Arendt, 2006 [1954]; Illich, 1970; Rancière, 1991; Masschelein and Simons, 2013; Biesta, 2014). The notion of the new plays a crucial role in these conceptions—whether it is the actual realization of the new (new words and/or new deeds, for Arendt and Biesta), or the *experience* of the new, for Illich and Masschelein & Simons. This is because the notion of the new retains an element of directionality that fulfills a perceived need that education must provide the students with something that transcends the given (be it in the form of knowledge, skills, or some other modification of who they are). Arendt, for example, while emphasizing the role of education to provide children with the “chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us,” also writes that the role of education is to “prepare them [the students] in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (Arendt, 2006, pp.

13-14). Similarly, Biesta stresses the idea that teaching needs to be connected to “an idea of ‘transcendence’,” that is, something “that radically comes from the ‘outside’” (2014, p. 6), in order to allow for “the coming into the world of what is uniquely and radically new” (ibid., p. 52). While Masschelein & Simons (2013) also emphasize the new as something to which the teacher introduces the students, by “bringing the old world to life” (2013, p. 87), there is a slight (but significant) shift in emphasis from the *realization* of the new, to the experience of the *possibility* and *potentiality* of the new. For them it is not (primarily) the new that accounts for the value of the experience, but the experience of the possibility of the (unqualified) new, that is, the *ability* to “make() new links between words and things” (ibid., p. 62), not its actualization.

While, in these conceptions of education, the teacher is crucial for allowing to bring about (the experience of) new ways of speaking and acting, we find the idea of infancy also in Rancière, for whom the teacher plays a less important role in bringing about what he considers the main goal of education: a realization of the equality of intelligences. In fact, for Rancière it is the absence of the teacher as the source of knowledge and truth (i.e., his or her ignorance), that makes this realization possible. And, rather than bringing about something new, for him, the purpose of education, is to realize something that is already there, namely the fact that we are equal with regard to our *capability* to speak, and thus, to learn. While he does not refer specifically to language, I believe that his use of intelligence can be understood, in Agambenian terms, as our capability to speak (and, thus, to think, to communicate, and to learn), making the goal of education the experience of recognizing in ourselves, and in others, the source of that

capability, that is, the experience of what Agamben calls in-fancy. As is the case for Agamben, this experience is not only important for the individual, but also for the kind of community it makes possible: “The equality of intelligence,” Rancière states, “is the common bond of humankind, the necessary and sufficient condition for a society of men to exist” (1991, p. 73).

Having located facets of the idea of in-fancy in various conceptions of education, I introduce Lewis’ notion of *study* as a weakly-utopian practice that contains the experience of in-fancy as a central and defining feature. Given that Lewis’ notion of *study* is derived from Agamben, it is not surprising that he comes closest to proposing a conception of education based on the experience of in-fancy (Lewis, 2013). The fact that *study* is both an educational category and a practice based on in-fancy, means that it forms a direct link between the idea of philosophy as a practice that is defined by in-fancy, on the one hand, and of philosophy for in-fancy as an educational practice, on the other. Key for an understanding of Lewis’ concept of study is its characterization as a “weakly utopian” activity. Weak utopianism, Lewis writes, is a state (individual, or communal) of a “*constant emergence* of the possibility of new uses within the space and time of the now” (ibid., p. 107), which, for him, makes it “*an education in our own incapability for utopian imagining within the present without committing to any one determinate form*” (ibid., pp. 107-108). In other words, Lewis is describing an educational practice that is both immanent, in that it is not directed at any goal or outcome (and, in fact, is defined by the lack of any such directionality), while, on the other hand, also introducing an element of transcendence into the practice itself. This

makes it possible to see philosophy as a practice that is driven by an intimation of truth (aimed at possible answers) that leads to an awareness of the contingency of language and truth, as itself as a desirable form of educational life.

Before exploring in more detail how such an educational form of life manifests itself at the classroom level, I consider existing conceptions and practices of philosophy with children, and the degree to which in-fancy is present in such conceptualizations. Among existing conceptions of philosophy with children (as in conceptions of philosophy, in general), the idea of in-fancy is present to varying degrees. What I show is that approaches that emphasize specific goals or outcomes (whether in terms of theory, practice, or both), run the risk of foreclosing on a (fuller) realization of the experience of in-fancy, and, thus, on what has been described as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy. Approaches, on the other hand, that remain completely immanent and lack an element of transcendence, run the opposite risk of becoming simply un-educational, and/or are no longer recognizable as philosophical practices. My goal is to identify those characteristics in existing approaches of philosophy with children that are compatible with the idea of in-fancy as the defining feature of the practice.

At this point in the presentation of my argument, I hope to have established, firstly, in what sense the experience of in-fancy can be seen as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy, secondly, that the notion of in-fancy allows us to articulate how it is possible that an experience by itself may be considered educationally valuable, and, finally, that there are aspects of existing approaches to the practice of philosophy with children that are compatible with the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice.

Next, I look in more detail at how, at the classroom level, the practice of philosophy with children (conceived as “philosophy for in-fancy”) can create the experience of in-fancy, what kind of community is made possible by this experience, and, what should be seen as the ultimate value (or *use*) of the practice. Building here on the phenomenological account of my own practice and my initial use of Agamben’s notion of im-potentiality as a first step toward a conceptualization of my practice (in the first chapter), I again draw from Agamben’s work, to capture the particular quality of the experience made possible by the lack of the voice of the teacher. The key to my argument is that the lack of facilitation of the teacher disrupts the common drive towards the actualization of specific outcomes. This disruption leads to an experience of in-fancy (i.e., the im-potentiality of language), that is, of the ability to speak and to not speak—a state that is ontologically prior to that of any (specific) actualization(s). Given that this is happening in an educational setting, the very presence of the teacher (as someone who is expected to teach) means that even in her silence, the teacher remains a representative of reasonableness and truth. To use an Agambenian turn of phrase, the role of the teacher could be understood as that of “teacher-as-not-teacher.” This also means that, while there is an experience of the contingency of language and truth, there also remains an intimation of truth, or, what we could call “truth-as-not-truth.” So in contrast to the postmodern, ludic, classroom, here, teaching and learning are only suspended, not destructed, preventing the experience from becoming simply un-educational.

Having established what makes the conversation in the practice of P4I educational, or rather, not simply un-educational, the question I address next is: What is

the educational value of such an experience? Or, rather, introducing here a term central to Agamben's more recent work (e.g., 2016): What is the educational *use* of the practice of P4I? Whereas *value* is commonly associated with monetary worth, or use-value, Agamben's appropriation of the term *use* is meant to reflect the particular nature of practices that are not valuable in that sense, without therefore being simply valueless. Like im-potentiality and in-fancy, *use* is itself a liminal term: It describes a practice that is neither useful, nor simply useless, but one that is happening on the boarder or threshold between usefulness and uselessness (as well as between theory and practice, description and evaluation). In a passage from an earlier work, Agamben expresses this idea in the context of a discussion of Benjamin's reading of Kafka, writing: "One day humanity will play with law just as children play with *disused* objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical *use* but to free them from it for good" (2005, p. 64, emphasis mine; see also Kotsko, 2014). Here, *use* is both descriptive and evaluative, referring to a praxis whose use consists in the restoration of an original lack of use (be it of objects, the law, or words). The term Agamben uses to capture the particular nature of the experience of the practice of *use* is *contemplation*. "Contemplation," he writes in *The Use of Bodies*, "is the paradigm of use" (2016, p. 63). So here we can say that, if contemplation is the paradigm of use, this makes study a kind of educational contemplation, and, thus, the paradigm of the use of education, and P4I an example of a kind of communal study in education.

Having shown that it is possible to talk about a practice that is not aimed at specific goals or outcomes as not simply un-educational, I go on to further specify that

this is something that should be happening in education. Given the lack of a specific goal or outcome that accounts for its value, this can only be done by describing the experience that is made possible by P4I, that is, the experience of in-fancy, as something that is desirable in itself. To do so, I adopt Lewis' notion of *ease*. Ease captures the particular quality of the experience if in-fancy. While primarily communal in nature, we can distinguish both an individual and a communal dimension of that experience. The two dimensions of *ease* correspond to the two types of *studying*, Lewis distinguishes, namely studying alone, and studying with others ("studying with ones friends"). According to Lewis, what leads to an experience of ease when studying is that there is a lack of "any desire to reach an end beyond ease itself," Lewis, 2013, p. 48). In other words, ease could be said to be the experiential state that accompanies and corresponds to *use* (in the way Agamben uses the term), given that it is an activity that is not directed at the acquisition of something that can be possessed or consumed (e.g., knowledge or skills). As such, ease is a particular kind of well-being that is made possible by P4I as a practice that is neither simply an in-activity, as it involves the pursuit of possible answers, while remaining immanent given that it is not directed at something outside of the practice itself. And it is the lack of the need to go beyond the practice, the sense of the practice as sufficient, that characterizes the experience of ease, made possible by P4I, as inherently desirable.

At a communal level, the desirable nature of the experience of ease can be further specified, by applying a term that Agamben uses to describe the relationship of members of a coming community, namely *love*. Love, for him, is the affection we receive from *use*

(Agamben, 2016, p. 165). For him, love becomes possible when we relate to each other as *singularities* or *whatever beings*, i.e., persons that are in a state of in-fancy (Agamben, 1993a). This means that the practice of philosophy, based on infancy, in education (the *use* of philosophy as a pedagogical practice) is that it allows for an experience of ease, and, at the communal level, for a community based on love. Like happiness (or, human flourishing), which, for Aristotle, is—unlike all other pursuits—not good for anything else, the *use* of the practice of philosophy, as a specifically educational form of communal contemplative study, should be equally seen as pure means (i.e., a means without end).

In terms of the procedural requirements for P4I, I argue that an Agambenian perspective underscores the need for procedures that ensure that the dialogue contains an intimation of truth (truth-as-not-truth), made possible by the teacher-as-not-teacher. The reason for this is that an intimation of truth, that is, the assumption that there are answers to the questions discussed means that it encourages the students to use assertions and arguments (as is the case in the original P4C-approach) that allow for the experience of the contingency of language and truth. The difference to P4C is that, instead of being actively guided toward more reasonable speech, P4I allows students to *use* assertions and arguments that is, to employ them on the threshold between their usefulness to question, compare, organize, challenge, or defend ideas, and their ultimate uselessness (given the absence of a universal standard of speaking and thinking).

Finally, I consider the significance of the use of P4I in schools and in society as a whole. In terms of the school, I employ Lewis' idea of the *notch* as a way to think of P4I

as an educational time and space that is not directed at any specific change, improvement, or educational goal, and instead represents a space where pure potentiality can be experienced. I then draw from the work of Masschelein and Simons (2013), and their idea that teaching is about the teacher sharing her love of the world with the students.

Applying this idea to P4I, the teacher in the P4I classroom could be said to share his or her love of the world (the world of philosophy, *qua* experience of in-fancy) with the students. The experience of the teacher as an example of in-fancy, allows the students to experience the love of the world expressed by the teachers in their other classes as different (but equally valid/invalid) ways of loving the world, allowing for a shift in the way they experience the school.

In terms of the relevance of the use of P4I in schools for society, finally, I argue that the practice of P4I can be seen as paradigmatic for a society that is neither utopian (directed at a better world), nor non-utopian (beholden to the status quo), but rather consists in a communal experiential state of the very possibility of thinking and articulating new ways of organizing our lives together. As a practice in schools, it can play the role of a paradigm, simply by being available as one possible form of life that is characterized by the fact that it can, as Hampe puts it, “open up the possibility for individuals and communities to be about more than asserting, producing, and acquiring” (2014, p. 102). To develop in more detail how the P4I-classroom community may play the role of a paradigm in society, I will consider its possible role in three conceptions of society: Dewey’s “Great Community” (2012), Rorty’s “Liberal Utopia” (1989) and Agamben’s “Coming Community” (1993a).

With regard to Dewey, the experience of in-fancy in the P4I classroom could be seen as the realization of the experience of the unity of opposites that he considers a defining feature of society as a *great community*. While Dewey himself sees education as a preparation for such a state (rather than where it can be fully realized), making this experience available to students should be seen as favorable—even in Dewey’s own understanding—for the realization of a great community. Similarly, the P4I-community can also be seen as a paradigm of what Rorty calls a *liberal utopia*. For Rorty, the ideal citizens in such a society, whom he calls *liberal ironists*, engage in public discourse while at the same time acknowledging the relative validity of their convictions. This kind of discourse creates a sense of solidarity among the citizens. The community of the P4I-classroom, I suggest, may be seen as a model for Rorty’s liberal utopia, in that the experience of in-fancy fosters a sense of liberal irony, and, thus, solidarity. With the important difference, that rather than preparing students for such a society in the future, in P4I the sense of solidarity (i.e., ease, or what Agamben calls love), is realized in the present. From an Agambenian perspective, finally, the P4I-community could be regarded as a paradigm for what he calls a *coming community*. Similar to Rorty’s idea of a liberal utopia, Agamben’s coming community is based on the experience of the contingency of language and truth, leading its members to maintain a sense of contingency with regard to their convictions. But while, for Rorty, the sense of solidarity is created (exclusively) at the level of language and discourse, for Agamben, the bonds that tie the members of the coming community together are formed through an experience of the indistinguishability of language *and* not-language, that is, at what could be considered an ontologically more

basic level of experience. I conclude that, while—not surprisingly—the P4I-classroom comes closest to being a paradigm for Agamben’s community, it is at least compatible with both Dewey’s Great Community, and Rorty’s Liberal Utopia.

1.4. Note on the Scope of the Dissertation

The fact that I focus in my dissertation on doing philosophy in formal educational settings, raises the question of why this investigation is limited to the practice of philosophy with young people and in schools, and doesn’t include philosophical practices in higher education, and/or outside of formal education settings. The latter is especially problematic, because it may suggest that educational institutions are seen as the natural home of philosophy (i.e., where *real* philosophy is done), while in fact the opposite could be said to be the case: It is, at least in part the goal of this dissertation to question the assumption that philosophy needs to be educational (in the sense of being directed at specific goals and outcomes), to be valuable. What privileges a formal educational setting, in this regard, is that there is already a relationship between education and philosophy that allows the practice to become questionable and be pushed to become something else than what it is. And whereas philosophy is firmly established in colleges and universities as an academic discipline (with a body of teachable knowledge and skills, if only in the form of a history of ideas), in schools, and especially in the lower grades, the status of the practice is much more fragile (“Why is philosophy done in school, if the students are not learning anything?”).

So, while the focus of this investigation is on the practice of philosophy with young people in schools, the broader point is that philosophy—whether it is done in-, or

outside of educational settings, and independent of the age of those who engage in it—should be seen as an example of a practice that is valuable, not only in spite of, but because it is not directed at specific goals or outcomes. Given the expectation existing in schools that learning needs to take place, the educational (instrumental) logic of education as human capital development can be *explicitly* disrupted, without becoming, for that reason, un-educational (mere play). In other words, while philosophy can of course happen outside of schools or universities, educational institutions could be seen as privileged with regard to realizing a particular form of educational life that can then be emulated throughout society, offering an alternative to the currently dominant, instrumental logic of the learning society, where learning (and education, more generally) is reduced to a necessary requirement for personal and professional advancement/survival.

1.5. Chapter Overview

The second chapter creates a context for the argument. It provides a phenomenological account of my experience with different practices of philosophy in educational settings and takes a first step toward articulating the educational value of philosophy as a practice that lacks facilitation by looking at the concepts of “wait time,” and Agamben’s concept of “im-potentiality. The third chapter, introduces “infancy” as the defining feature of Agamben’s notion of the practice of philosophy and locates it in a number of conceptions of the practice of philosophy, namely Socratic philosophy, the works of Nietzsche and Dewey, and Phenomenology. In the fourth chapter, I trace the idea of in-fancy in the conceptions of education of Dewey, Arendt, Illich, Rancière,

Masschelein & Simons, Biesta, and Lewis. In the fifth chapter, I explore the compatibility of the notion of in-fancy with existing approaches to doing philosophy with children. In the sixth chapter, I present the characteristic feature of the *use* of Philosophy for Infancy (P4I) at the classroom level. In the seventh chapter, finally, I consider the use of the practice of P4I in schools and in society as a whole.

Chapter 2: Phenomenological Reflections on the Practice of Philosophy in Education

Maybe it would be useful to ask what kind
of teaching is philosophical. What does
philosophical teaching look like? What does
it mean to experience philosophical enquiry?
(Haynes, 2011, p.17)

2.1. Introduction

The argument I am advancing in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation is mainly theoretical: I identify Agamben's notion of the experience of *in-fancy* as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy (Chapter 2), I then show how in-fancy is also contained in a number of prominent conceptions of education (Chapter 3), and in different approaches of doing philosophy with children (Chapter 4). I then take a closer look at the practice of philosophy based on in-fancy at the classroom-level (chapter 5), and its role as a paradigm in the school, and in the society as a whole (chapter 6). In this chapter, however, rather than speaking *about* practice, I will speak *from* practice—describing how doing philosophy in various educational settings led me to favor a certain type of practice—not based primarily on theoretical considerations, but on a difference in the quality of experience. The purpose of this is twofold: First of all, it is meant to provide a context for the theoretical argument I am advancing in the subsequent chapters of the dissertation, by showing how my theoretical considerations were motivated by the realization that my practice was no longer compatible with the Philosophy for Children

(P4C)-approach. Secondly, starting with a phenomenological account of my experience of doing philosophy is also directly related to the substance of my argument, insofar as it reflects my methodological commitment to the relevance of the lived experience of those involved in the classroom situation.

This view is mostly associated with a humanistic and phenomenological tradition in education, and, more specifically, with the concepts of *pedagogical tact* (Herbart; 1964; Muth, 1963; van Manen, 1991) and *pedagogical atmosphere* (Bollnow, 1989), but similar ideas can also be found in the work of William James (1958) and John Dewey (1991). However, while there is an acknowledgement of the importance of the quality of experience in these traditions, it is valued primarily as a pedagogical tool to realize certain educational outcomes—be it to improve the effectiveness of teaching (*pedagogical tact*), or learning (*pedagogical atmosphere*), or, to guide the process of inquiry (for Dewey).¹¹ In contrast, my intention here is to make it plausible that an experience, such as the one associated with the practice of philosophy, should by itself be considered valuable in an educational context, that is, not only in spite of, but because of the lack of its role in realizing specific educational goals or outcomes. So rather than first establishing a particular outcome as desirable or valuable, and then demonstrating how the experience made possible by the practice of philosophy can help realize that outcome, it is the experience that is made possible by engaging in philosophy itself that marks, in a certain sense, both the beginning and the end of this effort to re-conceptualize philosophy

¹¹ In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1991), for example, Dewey, refers to the significance of the “immediately pervasive quality” (p. 73) for what happens in a situation of communal inquiry.

as an educational practice. This also means that the argument ultimately rests on being able to articulate what it is about the experience that made it valuable to me.¹²

To illustrate what led me to my current practice, and what eventually prompted this investigation, I begin with a series of reflections on my different experiences with philosophy in educational settings, namely as a high school student, at university, and as a high school-, and middle school teacher. I then reflect in more detail on my experience of using the original P4C-approach in an extra-curricular philosophy course for 6-grade-middle schoolers—moving to increasingly less facilitation in the community of inquiry-segment of the practice, due to what I perceived as a difference in the quality of the experience. To make this difference tangible, I give a detailed account of the components of the original P4C-approach, highlighting those aspects of the practice that prompted me to divert from that practice. I augment this account with transcripts, notes, and student-feedback, from my own practice, as well as from the P4C-literature. I go on to take a first step toward an articulation of the educational value of a practice that lacks active facilitation by the teacher, using the notion of “wait-time” as an example of the pedagogical benefits of the temporary silence of the voice of the teacher (Rowe, 1987, 1996; Stahl, 1994). I then introduce Agamben’s concept of *im-potentiality*, as a first step toward understanding how the extended silence of the voice of the teacher can be considered valuable—not only as a pedagogical tool aimed at specific goals or outcomes, but for its own sake.

¹² In a certain sense, this could also be applied to the theoretical part of the dissertation, given that the literature used could be described as being ultimately based on the experience of each of the authors that lead to their views about the practice, and why considered it something worth engaging in.

2.2. Reflections on my Experience with Philosophy in Education (Four Vignettes)

In the following, I reflect on four different first-hand experiences of engaging in philosophy in various educational settings that shaped my view of the practice of philosophy: My experience of taking a philosophy course in high school, studying philosophy at the university, teaching a high school philosophy course, and, finally, teaching an extracurricular course with 6th-graders.

2.2.1. My experience with philosophy as a high school student. My first encounter with philosophy in an educational setting occurred when I was a student in a high school philosophy class. While the class was traditional in the sense that we were introduced to philosophical texts, our teacher used the texts mainly as prompts for discussion, and besides pointing to certain ideas in the text, or asking a specific question, he mostly let us talk amongst ourselves. More than the particular text we read or anything our teacher said, what I remember most vividly about the class, is the particular kind of atmosphere, or mood of the class. A mood that was created by the process of struggling with questions that didn't seem to have definite answers, while at the same time appearing to be of utmost importance. Given the lack of guidance from our teacher, we operated at the limits of our ability to comprehend and articulate our thoughts, often quite literally not knowing what we were talking about. This experience was exhilarating, both at a personal level (feeling that it was up to me to "figure it all out"), and, at a communal level, because of the particular bond that formed among the members of our class as we shared our ideas—and, more importantly, our ignorance (the limits of our understanding). Unlike in any of the other classes, our teacher seemed to have no intention to teach us.

And yet, his silence allowed us to realize that when it comes to certain fundamental questions there were no ultimate answers (and, thus, strictly speaking, nothing to teach), and that engaging in a quest for impossible answers with others could nevertheless be a deeply rewarding and meaningful activity.

2.2.2. My experience with philosophy as a university student. As a philosophy student at university, the focus naturally shifted from engaging in open-ended conversations to reading, analyzing, and discussing of philosophical texts, aimed at acquiring an understanding of the history of philosophy. As a result, discussions with fellow students, both inside, and outside of the classroom, focused primarily on ideas contained in the literature, and less on talking about our own ideas. The kind of conversations and experience I had had in my high school philosophy class, became rare, and, if they happened at all, were more likely to occur with other students or friends who didn't have a background in academic philosophy. For such conversations to be possible with other philosophy students seemed to require that we didn't think of ourselves primarily as philosophy students, and instead, as simply engaging in a conversation about a topic that happened to be of a philosophical nature. This absolved us, as it were, from adhering to certain standards of academic discourse, such as supporting our points with references to philosophical texts, and to instead base our arguments on personal experience.

2.2.3. My experience with philosophy as a high school teacher. During my first assignment as a high school teacher, I served as the advisor to the philosophy club. Given that the students had very little background in the history of philosophy, and that there

was no expectation, or requirement, to use philosophical texts, the discussion amongst the students, and the kind of atmosphere and quality of the experience reminded me a lot of my high school philosophy class. Now in the role of the teacher, I experienced the activity in a very similar way—enjoying the kind of mood I had felt in high school, and witnessing the students engage in the same kind of struggle to articulate their ideas and make sense of what the other students were saying. And in spite of my familiarity with what had been written about the topics of the conversation, the kind of openness of the students (due to a lack of familiarity with the tradition), also allowed me to join them in a genuinely philosophical discussion. Besides my own enjoyment of engaging in this kind of conversation, I was thrilled to be able to provide the students with the kind of experience I myself had cherished as a student.

Encouraged by this experience, I accepted the offer to teach a regular philosophy course. While the class was designed as an introduction to the history of philosophy, given my previous experiences with philosophy, I began each unit with a discussion of open-ended questions, such as “What is reality?”, or “What is beauty?”, or certain warm-up activities,¹³ to give the students an opportunity to talk about a particular issue based on their own experience, before being introduced to philosophical texts. What I noticed was that there was a tangible difference between those introductory discussions, and the analysis and discussion of philosophical texts that followed. While the students seemed fully engaged during the initial discussion, the mood changed significantly when we

¹³ For the unit on Epistemology, for example, I would give students a list of diverse items (the chair you’re sitting on, the number seven, justice, the NFL, your mind, the mind of the person next to you, etc.), asking them to rank the items on a scale from 1 (least real) to 10 (most real).

turned to the discussion of philosophical texts. Before, the focus had been on sharing each other's ideas, now it was on learning about what others (professional philosophers) had written about a particular topic. At the same time, my role as teacher moved from facilitating a discussion among the students, to that of presenting and interpreting for the students the ideas contained in the texts we read. And it occurred to me that just like they seemed more interested in sharing their own thoughts and ideas with each other, I was ultimately more interested in what they had to say than interpreting for them what others had said. While engaged conversations still happened, even during our discussion of philosophical texts, they happened more by accident than by design, namely, when students were able to relate to an idea in a text to their own lives—making the discussion no longer about the text, but about their own ideas and experiences.

Because of this difference in the quality of experience between those different parts of the class, I found myself expanding what were meant to be introductory discussions—delaying, as it were, the move to a discussion of the texts, which I knew would lead to a less engaging, and ultimately less enjoyable and rewarding experience for everybody involved. To allow as much time as possible for such discussions, I ended up reducing the number and size of philosophical texts, and limited the references to specific authors to what was necessary to meet the course requirements. This appeared to be a good compromise, as it left sufficient time for discussions, while also familiarizing students with some aspects of the history of philosophy. But even then, that is, when the texts were treated merely as prompts rather than the main focus of the class, they seemed

ultimately not necessary for—and potentially detrimental to—the kind of experience I had come to associate with the practice of philosophy.

2.2.4. My experience of philosophy with 6th-grade middle school students.

Looking for approaches of teaching philosophy in a more dialogical, and less text-oriented way, I discovered the original P4C-approach, developed by Matthew Lipman, in the 1970s (Lipman et al, 1980).¹⁴ This approach was very much in line with my attitude toward teaching philosophy, because of its focus on dialogue, rather than philosophical texts and/or specific references to philosophical ideas.¹⁵ And when I was offered to design and teach an extra-curricular Philosophy-course with 6th graders, I decided to base the class on the Philosophy for Children (P4C)-model. What made this model especially appealing was that it came with extensive materials that provided a procedural structure to the class, and guidance of the facilitation of the dialogic component (Community of Inquiry), in particular. But in spite of embracing the approach at first, I found myself moving away from the more directional features of the practice, not so much based on theoretical considerations, but because it simply felt more appropriate to give the students more space to speak among themselves than trying to move the discussion in some

¹⁴ While what I refer to as the “original P4C-approach” is a very clearly defined program, it has led to a wide range of practices in the course of its proliferation in the last 40+ years. My focus here is only on the original approach. Differences between approaches will be discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁵ In contrast to the secondary or college level, when doing philosophy with children or younger students, the use of philosophical texts is not an option, simply because they lack the literary skills needed to comprehend philosophical texts. Which means that, if we want children to engage in philosophy at all, we need to think of other ways to do so. It is, in part, this realization that led to the development of the original P4C-program, as a way to introduce children to philosophy, not through philosophical texts, but by engaging them in philosophical dialogue, that is, by doing philosophy, rather than learning about philosophy (Lipman et al., 1980; Matthews, 1982; Lipman, 1988, 2003). Rather seeing this as a shortcoming, advocates of philosophy with children have seen it as a blessing—given that it allows children to engage in a more originary form of philosophy that can serve as an example of how philosophy can, and should, be done, independent of age, and both inside, and outside of educational settings.

direction, given that any such intervention seemed to take away from the quality of the experience. In the following, I will take a close look at the different components of a typical P4C-session, pointing to those aspects of the practice that prompted me to modify the original P4C-model.

2.3. Toward a Modified Version of P4C: Silencing the Voice of the Teacher

A typical P4C-practice has the following components: First, there is a “stimulus” that consists in reading a passage from a philosophical novel, written especially for that purpose, which is meant to generate questions. A question to be discussed is then determined with more or less involvement by the teacher (“Agenda”). This is followed by a discussion of the chosen question (“Community of Inquiry”). The discussion is followed by reflections on the discussion (“Assessment”). Finally, there are “exercises” that can be used to reinforce certain aspects of the practice (Gregory, 2008). I will discuss each of these components, in turn, and reflect on my experience of using them, and how and why I ended up diverting from this model.

2.3.1. The role of stimuli used to generate questions. One of the key features of the original practice of P4C is the use of philosophical novels, specifically written for this purpose by Mathew Lipman (e.g., Lipman, 1985). The novels feature situations in which mostly children engage in conversations about a range of topics of a philosophical nature. The novels are meant to introduce philosophical themes, stimulate philosophical questions, and model the process of philosophical inquiry. According to Lipman et al, “[t]he books are works of fiction in which the characters eke out for themselves the laws of reasoning and the discovery of alternative philosophical views that have been

presented through the centuries” (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 82). Depicting “fictional children discovering and exploring philosophical issues in life situations” (Gregory, 2008 p. 9), each of the novels is written for a specific age group, reflected by the content and the nature and complexity of the conversation. At the beginning of each session, a passage from one of the novels is read out loud, usually by the students themselves. According to Lipman, the purpose of the philosophical novel is to “stimulate in children patterns of questioning and discussion that are first modeled by the fictional characters in the novels and subsequently continued, by internalization and appropriation, by the live children in the classroom” (Lipman, 1996, p. 156). The following passage from Lipman’s first philosophical novel, *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (1985), may serve as an example:

‘Fran insisted that a person could see and touch his body, but he couldn’t see or touch his mind. ‘When you say ‘mind’,” Fran concluded, ‘all you’re talking about is your brain. Only things you can see or touch are real.’

‘Lots of real things are things we can’t see or touch are real,’ Laura objected. ‘For example, if I go for a swim, is there really some kind of thing called a swim? If I go for a walk or a ride, are there really things called walks and rides?’ (Lipman, 1985, p. 28)

Based on the reading, the students are then asked to think of questions they would like to discuss (in this case, the question may be: “Are the things in our mind real?”). The philosophical novels serve a dual purpose: To present children with a stimulus that already contains philosophical ideas, and to provide them with a model for specifically

philosophical discourse.¹⁶ By reading the text out loud, the students are reenacting what is happening in the novels, where children are shown in certain everyday situations that stimulate philosophical questions, only that here, the “real-life” situation is that of students in a classroom reading from a philosophical novel. The purpose of this is to communicate to students what philosophical questions are and how they can arise from regular everyday situations, what it means to engage in a philosophical discussion, and how such discussions can lead to some sense of resolution (e.g., a better understanding of the issue, etc.).¹⁷

Having used philosophical novels in my own practice, I believe that the main advantage of their use as a stimulus is that, rather than having to tell students more or less directly, the novels show or sample what philosophical questions are (e.g., how they differ from factual questions) and what a philosophical discussion may look like. It is therefore not surprising that Lipman’s philosophical novels are considered an essential part of the program, and that the use of alternative, non-philosophical stimuli or prompts is recommended only after “teachers and students are competent in the tools and methods of philosophical inquiry” (Gregory, 2008, p. 9). Once they are able to “recognize philosophical issues and conduct philosophical dialogue,” according to P4C guidelines, “any stimulus material may be used, e.g., a thought-provoking piece of literature, a

¹⁶ With regard to the role of the philosophical novel in P4C, see also: Darryl Matthew De Marzio’s article “What Happens in Philosophical Texts: Matthew Lipman’s Theory and Practice of the Philosophical Text as Model” (de Marzio, 2011).

¹⁷ Gregory and Granger, for example, refer in this regard to Dewey’s “phenomenology of inquiry, according to which ... inquiry must begin with a problem, question, or doubt and must aim at a solution or resolution, both of which are genuinely felt—something in which the inquirer actually has a stake” (Gregory and Granger, 2012, p. 13).

current event, an incident on the playground” (ibid.). While it is clear from these quotes that the purpose of the novels is not merely to familiarize students with philosophical dialogue, but to sample *good* philosophical dialogue (the *proper* use of the “tools and methods of philosophical inquiry”), the fact that the novels provided students with a sense of the nature of philosophical questions and philosophical dialogue, out-weighs, in my opinion, any concern about directionality. And while the students may pick up on the didactic nature of the novels, this did not affect their usefulness of introducing them to philosophical ideas, and of helping to generate questions of a philosophical nature.¹⁸

Based on my experience, I believe that replacing prompts that contain specifically philosophical ideas with ones that do not (as is the case in some variants of the original P4C, where poems, short stories, photos, artwork, or role playing are used as prompts) is certainly possible, only that, in that case, it has to be ensured, in some other way, that the questions that are being generated by the students, and the subsequent discussion, are of a philosophical nature (however broadly conceived). And while this can be done, for example, by developing criteria for philosophical questions at the beginning of the course,¹⁹ the advantage of familiarizing students with philosophical questions in a narrative context is, again, that students can be shown, rather than being told. The problem of allowing for any kind of question as a basis for discussion, on the other hand,

¹⁸ Another issue was that the students felt that the content seemed dated, which could, of course, be easily remedied by using more recent texts, either chosen from existing literature or specifically created for this purpose (e.g., Haynes and Murris, 2012; Wartenberg, 2014).

¹⁹ This can be done, for example, by collecting criteria for philosophical questions from the students. An exercise to develop such criteria that I have used in my practice, is to give students a list of different kinds of questions (factual, non-factual, etc.) and ask them to identify those that they think are philosophical, and to then list criteria of what makes them so (e.g., that they are open-ended, don’t have just one right answer, and so forth).

is that the dialogue may no longer be distinguishable as philosophical (however broadly conceived), or the practice as a *philosophical* practice.²⁰

2.3.2. Determining a question for discussion. In addition to using novels that contain philosophical ideas as prompts, there is an additional step in a typical P4C-session that ensures that the questions that are generated are likely to lead to a philosophical discussion. Here, the original P4C-approach allows for a range of options, from working with students on “improving” the phrasing of the question to ensure a “productive” discussion, to accepting the students’ questions as they are. The following is an account of the significance of this step for the practice:

After sharing a philosophical story or some other stimulus, students identify the issues they are interested to discuss, collaborating in the construction of the agenda or lesson plan. This is typically accomplished by making a list of discussion questions. It is important that the students understand that their questions should be not about the story itself, but something the story has made them think about, or wonder about. The facilitator may need to help the students articulate philosophical questions, or turn their original questions into more philosophical ones, for example, by asking them to turn questions about the text into more general questions. (Gregory, 2008, p. 9)

²⁰ These theoretical reflections will be taken up again, and continued in chapter 4, where I discuss the problem of practices that are no longer recognizably philosophical because they remain completely open with regard to format and content of the practice.

It is clear from this quote, that the role of the teacher in the original P4C-approach is to ensure that the question is not only philosophical in a broad sense, but that it be a *good* philosophical question (“more philosophical”), that is, a question that, in the opinion of the teacher, can lead to a productive philosophical discussion. To that end, the teacher may have to filter, amend, rephrase (or help students rephrase) a question that is being proposed.

In my own practice, I felt that whenever I tried to get students to come up with, or help them rephrase what I considered to be a “more philosophical” question, they saw this as an attempt, on my part, to change “their” question into “my” question. In other words, they seemed well aware that I did indeed have an agenda, namely that of getting them to accept a question that I considered most appropriate for a philosophical discussion. The way I experienced the situation was: “How can I change the question to one that is appropriate for the kind of discussion I believe to be most effective to meet my goals, while also making the students feel that the question was really still their question (only now more clearly stated).” The students’ experience, on the other hand, seemed to be: “He doesn’t like the question we came up with, and now he wants us to change it (give it up), but we don’t want to.” In other words, because it was clear to the students that I was trying to get them to accept a particular question (that wasn’t really theirs), this turned into a struggle of whose question would “win.”²¹

²¹ And whatever we mean by good or bad discussion, at least in my experience, it often happens that what I considered a bad question turned into a good discussion, and that a presumably good question lead to a bad discussion---the latter in part because the students resisted discussing questions that had been modified.

Whether this component is considered valuable or not, depends ultimately on how clearly the purpose of the practice is defined. If the purpose is to move the conversation amongst the students toward more reasonableness, it is indeed crucial to arrive at a question that leads to the kind of discussion that is philosophical in nature (open-ended, lending itself to arguments and counter-arguments, etc.). If this is not the primary purpose of the practice, on the other hand, there is also more leeway with regard to what questions are seen as appropriate. At the level of experience, what is at stake, and what is reflected in the power-struggle with the students about which question is chosen, is the very nature of the practice: Is it about teaching them something (how to do philosophy well), or is it about giving the students the space—within the confines of the procedural framework—to ask the kinds of questions they want to ask, and talk about them in a way that they want to talk about them. Or, to use a common phrase used in P4C, is this really about “following the inquiry where it leads,” or is this about “following the inquiry to where the teacher wants it to lead”?

Given my own experience with philosophy, and what I have come to value about the experience, it seemed clearly preferable to me to be as flexible as possible with the regard to the questions that were being proposed, as long as they met very broad, previously established and agreed upon criteria for what counts as a philosophical question (open-ended, not factual, etc.). This preserved the students’ sense of ownership, while also making them feel that the practice was really about their questions, what they were thinking, and what they wanted to talk about—which seemed crucial to allow for the kind of experience I have come to associate with the unique nature of the practice.

2.3.3. Philosophical discussion. The “Community of Inquiry” forms the pedagogical cornerstone of the original P4C-approach. The idea of a *Community of Inquiry* goes back to Peirce, and, in its application to education, to Dewey, but it is Lipman who introduced it as a particular pedagogical practice into education (e.g., Lipman, 2003). It is with regard to the Community of Inquiry-component that my own practice ended up diverging from the original approach most significantly. This is because it is the part of the practice in which directionality toward certain outcomes is most tangible, as it is the task of the teacher to ensure that the discussion moves toward more reasonable speech. My purpose here is not to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the original P4C approach (for such theoretical considerations, see chapter 4). What I want to do here is merely to create a sense of the difference in experience, between a directional approach (such as the original P4C-model), and an approach that is not directional.

To illustrate the nature of the conversation in the community of inquiry-component of the original P4C-model, and the role of the teacher, in particular, I will use an example taken from the literature. In this transcript from Ronald Reeds article “Fifth Graders Discuss Evidence, Knowledge and Truth” (1980, p. 69; cited in Wang, 2016), students read a chapter from Lipman’s novel *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (1985), leading to a discussion about what it means to prove something. Ron is the name of the teacher.

Ron: Can I prove to you something that is false? Can I prove to
 you $2 + 2 = 5$?

- Holly: *You can prove it*, but I wouldn't believe it because I know it's not true.
- Beth: But then you wouldn't be proving it. I mean I'd know it was false and you'd know it was false and it wouldn't be proof.
- Holly: So if we both knew it was false then it would not be proved.
- Mitch: What about if you were proving it to 10 people and make believe some people knew it was true and some people know it was false. Then could you prove it?
- Beth: If some people knew it was true ...
- Ron: *Isn't that a different case?* Weren't we talking about it being false?
- Mitch: Right. It is false for some people, but it is true for other people.
- Ron: Remember the discussion we had on contradiction. A sentence can't be both true and false at the same time. $2+2=4$ is either true or false. Can't be both, right?
- Mitch: Right.
- Ron: Right. You did agree before. *You can change your mind if you want.*

Mitch: O.K. What about if... If... What Beth said was something... *Beth said something would not be a proof because I know it was false and you know it was false.*

Ron: Beth is saying...

Beth: ... *that you can't prove something that everybody knows is false. Or really you can't prove something that is false.*

(Pause)

Ron: That's a pretty big change, an addition you made there?
No?

Beth: What.

Ron: Well first you said you can't prove something that everybody knows is false. Then you said you can't prove something that simply *is false*. Whether people *know* it's true or false doesn't seem to matter them.

Beth: O.K.

(Pause)

Ron: Well, what do you want to say now?

Beth: *The second one. It doesn't matter whether anybody knows or not.*

Ron: O.K. Anybody else has anything to say.

(Pause)

Ron: I bet there's a lot more we could say about proof. But maybe we have enough to begin comparing things. If you prove something, what you prove must be true. Right.

(Cited in: Wang, 2016, pp. 105-106, emphases by Wang)

As this example shows, the presence of the teacher's voice is quite tangible. The students are either responding to questions by the teacher, or, while talking to each other, seem aware of (and guided by) the presence of the teacher as the ultimate authority with regard to the appropriateness or relevance of their contributions. While the role of the teacher in guiding the conversation may be especially pronounced in this example, it seems nevertheless representative of what is seen as the function of the teacher in the original P4C-approach, namely, to make clarifications, suggestions, corrections, and, generally speaking, move the conversation to a higher level of reasonableness. It also illustrates how this affects the general feel of the practice, given that the students are aware that the teacher has an agenda and that there is something she knows (and they don't) that they need to learn ("She is teaching us how to do philosophy, and how to get better at it.").

The reason I became increasingly less involved in facilitating the discussion was that it seemed to be exactly the lack of facilitation, the lack of my efforts to make the students speak or think in a certain way that accounted for the kind of experience I was looking for. As long as I was amending, correcting, guiding, and evaluating their contributions, the students would look toward me as the one who was ultimately in charge. And it was only when I wasn't intervening at all that the students stopped seeing me as the ultimate authority. The more this happened, the less I felt inclined to intervene,

sensing that whatever the benefits of such interventions might be (e.g., allowing for more reasonable speech to emerge), would re-established me in the role of the one who knows how the discussion needed to be conducted, and where it should lead. As I eventually stopped intervening all together, the students seemed to almost forget about me, which led me, as the teacher, to be somehow simultaneously present and not present. And it was this role of being both absent (as the voice of the teacher), while also remaining present (as the teacher) that seemed to be responsible for the particular kind of quality of the experience.

To provide a sense of the difference between a directional discussion and one that lacks facilitation by the teacher, I will use an example from my own practice with 6-th grade students. The stimulus for this discussion consisted in reading an excerpt from one of Lipman's philosophical novels (Lipman, 1985) that contained a conversation about time. Of the questions that were generated by the students the students had chosen the question: "What is time?"²²

Noopur: Time is something you use to describe something. Can go on forever.

Lindsay: Time is not a thing. Sequencing of events. Experience one thing after another.

²² One of the procedural rules used was that after contributing, a given student would call on another student. Students indicated with their fingers how many times they had already spoken, and students who had contributed less times had to be chosen over those who had contributed more times, which accounts for the fact that so many students in the class participated. It should also be mentioned that the text is based on notes taken during the discussion, and not a literal transcript.

- Samantha: Abstract concept. What happened first. These two things combined.
- Isabelle: Not a thing, used to level things—organize things.
- Emma: Time is not real—string of events, then labeled. Events passing.
- Caroline: Time is the measure of what you do—gives meaning to everything (e.g. waking up, going to school, etc.). Time is life.
- James: Like in-between-space. Hard to describe.
- Dilan: Nothing. Abstract idea. Without time we would still have life, but we couldn't measure anything (school day).
- Sunjay: Was started by somebody. Helps to keep track.
- Eray: Time was created (24 hours). Time is the aging process.
- Anthony: Time is mental (bugs don't have time). It's a dimension. We are so used to it – can't think without it. Could survive, but would be hard.
- Jennifer: Time is "When?" Order of things. When we do stuff.
- Emma: Man woke up one day and decided to create time? Doesn't agree: There are scientific reasons for the 24-hour day.
- Samantha: Without time there would be no reason to go on.
- Caroline: Different calendars (for example, Mayan), not different systems of measuring time.

- Eino: Without time there would be no life.
- James: Mayan calendar predicted that the world would come to an end.
- Dilan: Difference between time and how we keep track of time.
Time is going on. Without time we would all be frozen, like one frame in a movie.
- Noopur: Agrees. There are scientific reasons for 24-day. In Egypt time is what balances life. Without time, events would be meshed up, there would be series of events without stopping.
- Isabelle: Time is how you look at things (sunlight/shadow). Relation of time to light/dark, day/night.
- Anthony: Sundial. Mentions use of pyramids, shadow, etc. to measure time of the year/seasons. Mayan calendar: we are reading it wrong.

On a *prima facie* level, what may be most noticeable when we compare this conversation with the one from the community of inquiry-session, is the complete absence of the voice of the teacher—both literally, and, more importantly, as the voice of reasonableness that, in the original P4C-model, is meant to guide the students toward more reasonable speech. While the discussion also contains arguments, logical inferences, and so forth, and, thus, may be indistinguishable from a traditional P4C-session, there is something about the complete absence of the voice of the teacher that, by itself, seems to point to a

qualitatively different experience: Because of the silence of the teacher's voice (as the voice of reasonableness and truth), the students are talking to, or with each other, rather than *for* the teacher, which—in their minds—makes their own, and everybody else's contributions, equally valid.

Before returning to the question of what might make the lack of the voice of the teacher during the dialogue-section of the practice educationally valuable, I will look at two more components of a typical P4C-session: the reflection/assessment-component, typically following the community of inquiry-session, and the use of activities and exercises.

2.3.4. Assessment. In the original P4C-approach, the community of inquiry is typically followed by a reflection on the discussion, referred to as “the assessment.” The purpose of this component in the original P4C-model is to evaluate the course of the discussion, and to reinforce both procedural and content-related rules. The following excerpt from the *Practitioner Handbook* (Gregory, 2008, p. 11) describes the role of the assessment in the practice:

The objective of classroom philosophy sessions is neither to find *final answers* to the questions that are raised, nor to reach complete agreement among the community. On the other hand, a genuine dialogue ‘moves forward’ in some sense that distinguishes it from mere lively conversation. Philosophy for Children seeks two kinds of objectives: progress in coping with the philosophical questions—which might include adapted beliefs, new hypotheses for experiment or even clarification of the question—and

growth in the cognitive and social procedures of inquiry. ... questions such as: - Are we giving each other reasons for our views? Did we scratch beneath the surface? Are we listening to each other? ... Did we get anywhere with our questions? (Gregory, 2008, p. 11)

As is the case with some of the other components of the practice, there is a mix here between stated objectives that are clearly directional (“growth in the cognitive and social procedures of inquiry”), others that are more procedural (“Are we listening to each other?”), and those that are a combination of the two (“Did we scratch beneath the surface?” “Are we giving each other reasons for our views?”). In spite of the fact that these questions are directed at content-related, and procedural issues, based on my experience students perceived this as an evaluation of how well they did, and how they could get better at following the rules that would make for a better discussion.

While there is clearly emphasizing the directionality toward more reasonable speech, I found this component of the practice nevertheless useful, as long as it was limited to reflections on the conversation, in general, and on the adherence to merely procedural rules. What seemed to reinforce the directionality of the practice, was asking specific questions about the appropriateness of the questions chosen, or the quality of the content of the conversation, and about how these aspects of the practice could be improved. Leaving it up to the students to decide what they wanted to comment on (whether procedural, or content-related aspects), on the other hand, proved useful, both in terms of giving them a chance

to reflect on the content of the discussion, and, to address any purely procedural, behavioral, or disciplinary issues.²³

2.3.5. Exercises and activities. Finally, according to the *Practitioner Handbook*, the purpose of additional exercises used in the original P4C-approach is to “increase the students’ work” by “introduc[ing] philosophical exercises, discussion plans, and activities,” meant to “give the students practice in making particular kinds of philosophical or thinking ‘moves’” (Gregory, 2008, p. 11). Such exercises may include: “a practical experiment with a philosophical idea, interviews with family, friends and community members about philosophical questions, ... creative expression—e.g. painting, photography or play writing—of a philosophical idea” (ibid., pp. 11-12). Again, we encounter here a mix of both directional and non-directional features and exercises that are meant to re-inforce specific skills, and those that are designed to merely apply, or play with ideas. Consistent with my other modifications, I avoided activities or exercises that were directed at the development of specific skills (e.g., argumentation, logical reasoning, etc.), but did sometimes use activities to stimulate questions, or, to further explore ideas that came up during a discussion.

In summary, I found that those aspects of the various components of the original P4C-model that were geared toward actively moving students toward better (e.g., more logical or reasonable) speech, took away from what I had come to think of as the

²³ Examples of comments, from my own practice, are: “We did a lot better, but there was too much repetition;” “We weren’t perfect but really good;” “There were no unnecessary side comments.” And while the reflections included both procedural and content-related remarks, the decisive difference to the assessment component in P4C was that I wasn’t actively soliciting responses about their performance, and, thus, avoided the impression that they were being evaluated with regard content or specific skills.

particular quality of the experience made possible by the practice of philosophy. At the same time, the procedural framework seemed crucial in making the lack of facilitation in the conversational component of the practice possible (and feasible in an educational setting). But in spite of the fact that my lack of facilitation felt intuitively right to me (both, as philosopher *and* teacher), the lack of directionality of the practice (most notably during the conversation-component), seemed to be at odds with my role as a teacher. What I asked myself was: How can a practice that lacks any active movement toward the acquisition of knowledge or skills still be considered valuable (or even appropriate) in an educational setting? Given that the main difference of my practice to the original P4C-model was the lack of what I have called the voice of the teacher (as the voice of reasonableness and truth), I will, in the following, present the notion of *think-*, or *wait time* as an example of a conceptualization of the silence of the voice of the teacher in educational theory.²⁴

2.4. Pedagogical Value of the Silence of the Voice of the Teacher (*Wait-Time*)

Most teachers will be familiar with the feeling we get when a student asks us a question and we pause, trying to avoid a direct answer. In a foreign language class, for example, a student may ask for the meaning of a specific word in English. Instead of answering right away, we may instead think of ways of explaining the meaning of the word in the target language by using synonyms, circumlocution, or by emphasizing familiar parts of the word. Independent of the subject and the nature of the question, there

²⁴ For a more recent exploration of the role of the silence of the voice of the teacher and Philosophy for Children, see also: Lavery, M. J. (2015). "Philosophy for Children and Listening Education: An Ear for Thinking," in: Waks, Leonard J. (ed.), *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*, Albany: SUNY Press.

is something about the particular quality of that moment of silence that is created by a question that is not answered right away.

That delaying the response to an answer can be pedagogically significant is well-documented and is associated with the concepts of “wait time,” “think time,” and “pause time” (Rowe, 1987, 1996; Stahl, 1994). Even small increases in the time the teacher takes to answer a question or to call on a student have been shown to have substantial benefits, ranging from an increase in the number, length and correctness of students’ responses, to improved scores on academic achievement tests (Stahl, 1994). But there is something about the nature and intensity of that moment of silence by itself that seems to suggest that it could be significant beyond its use as a pedagogical tool. Stahl, for example, points in that direction when he describes the effects of what he calls “impact pause-time” (one of eight types of “wait“- or “think-time” he distinguishes). He writes:

Impact pause-time occurs when the most dramatic way to focus attention at a given time is to provide a period of uninterrupted silence. ... One example of a desired result is creation of a particular mood or affective environment, such as when sudden silence may generate a feeling or mood of anticipation, expectation, drama, suspense, or uncertainty. (Stahl, 1994, p. 7)

Again, most teachers (and students) will be able to attest to the dramatic quality and potential impact of such a “period of uninterrupted silence.” Even the slightest delay in answering a question, a brief interruption in the teacher’s presentation, will almost immediately alert students to the situation, and make them wonder if there is something

wrong: Does the teacher not know the answer? Is she upset? The longer the moment lasts, the more it increases in intensity. Something is not right. The sudden silence has disrupted the well-oiled machinery of the classroom (fueled by the voice of the teacher). But there is drama involved for the teacher as well. Even though she has intentionally created this moment of silence, it will be hard for her not to be affected by that mood of “anticipation, expectation and uncertainty.” The students expect her to do something. Her job is to teach, and teaching is an activity that implies answering students’ questions. Not answering, falling silent, amounts to a refusal to teach. What accounts for this powerful effect of such periods of uninterrupted silence? How can not doing something, that is, a lack of action (an *in-action*) have such a strong impact? And what would happen if the answer was permanently delayed, the moment of silence infinitely extended?

In a certain sense this describes the effect, both on the students, and the teacher, of engaging in a philosophical discussion that lacks teacher facilitation. What is missing here is the voice of the teacher, that is, the voice of reasonableness and truth. While in other subjects the answer to a factual question can be only temporarily delayed (given that there *is* an answer, and either the students come up with it themselves, validated by the teacher, or the teacher will provide it), due to the fact that philosophical questions are open-ended, while also containing an intimation of truth that drives and sustains the conversation—the voice of the teacher can be permanently silenced.

What makes this scenario fundamentally different from any other situation in a school setting is that the teacher is perceived as not teaching, which also means that the students experience this as a lack of learning, without therefore thinking of it as simply

un-educational. That this is indeed how the students experience a practice lacks teacher facilitation, can be discerned—in a *prima facie*, anecdotal way—from students' comments about the practice. In a questionnaire, my students completed at the end of my classes, for example, they expressed how they thought the class was different from their other classes, because it was not “academic,” and because they didn't learn much, while also indicating that they found it enjoyable, for reasons other than thinking of it as just free time. The following comments (all based on one particular group of students) reflect well this mix of sentiments: “I learned not a lot.”; “It was fun.”; “I like that we were able to express ourselves.”; “It was really relaxed and flexible.”; “Having cool discussions/not ‘academic’.”; Relaxing.”; “I thought the class would be boring, but it was so much fun.”; “You can put friends and enemies aside.”; “It's good to have fun, but you have to show respect for others.” What these statements suggest is that the students experienced the practice as a combination of a lack of learning, enjoyment (relaxing, ability to express themselves), and of a particular sense of community. In a certain sense it is the goal of this dissertation to make plausible that this kind of experience that is neither entirely educational (in a traditional sense), nor simply non-educational (i.e., mere play), is something that has a place in an educational setting.

2.5. Non-pedagogical Value of the Silence of the Voice of the Teacher (*Im-potentiality*)

Having given an account of the pedagogical value of the experience that is made possible by the temporary silence of the teacher, I will now consider whether it is possible to describe the extended silence of the voice of the teacher during the conversation-component of my practice, as educationally valuable—not for its

pedagogical value (of aiding in the realization of specific goals or outcomes), but for its own sake. What is the educational value of such an experience? Or maybe rather, what kind of conception of education would allow for such an activity to be considered valuable? I will here take a first step toward formulating a response to these questions, by employing Agamben's notion of *impotentiality*, that is, the idea that true potentiality is not only the potential to do, but also to not-do.

To understand how this idea can be implied to the situation of the teacher in the practice of philosophy with children without facilitation, it is crucial to consider that the practice is happening in an educational context. In this context, inaction on the part of the teacher violates the basic assumption underlying the logic of education: that what needs to be happening in the classroom is learning, and, thus teaching (which is also the reason that even a brief moment of silence on the part of the teacher, as in the case of "think-," or "wait time," can have such a powerful effect). According to the logic of education, learning could be described (in very general terms) as the process of developing or realizing whatever potential (in the form of abilities, skills, talents, etc.) the student already possesses. What is problematic about this view, is that it focuses on something that is already there, however dormant, and on the task of the teacher as that of developing such existing abilities, skills, and talents toward their more or less clearly perceived (preconceived) realization. In other words, it is the idea of *learning* based on a notion of potentiality that aims at moving—as completely and efficiently as possible—from potential to actualization. As such, it corresponds to the idea of the learning society that, according to Lewis, "emphasize[s] investment into potentiality in order to fully

actualize this [existing] potential in the form of constant measurement or performance outcomes” (Lewis, 2013, p. 6). He continues:

Thus the child must suffer an alteration through learning that destroys the ‘not yet’ in order to fully actualize a latent potentiality for adulthood, citizenship, or productivity (i.e., transform the ‘not yet’ into the necessity of the ‘must be’ of the professional, employable adult). (ibid.)

In other words, what, according to Lewis, is problematic about a model of education based on learning as the development of potentiality (*qua* realization of the student’s potential), is that it forecloses on the experience of a state of (true) potentiality, that, according to Lewis, is what “makes the actual possible” (ibid.). For Lewis, Agamben’s concept of im-potentiality reflects this truer kind of potentiality, in that it allows for an experience of more than that which is to be actualized, that is, of a “more than,” or a surplus with regard to the process (and the experience) of actualization--the un-actualized being preserved as a possibility.

In order to understand how the idea of im-potentiality can help us understand the nature, and the educational value of the experience that is made possible by the silence of the voice of the teacher, I turn to Agamben’s discussion of the notion of *potentiality*. In *On Potentiality* (1999), Agamben refers to a distinction Aristotle makes between two types of potentiality. One is the potential to acquire a particular knowledge or skill that has not yet been acquired, the second is the ability to apply already acquired knowledge or skills to perform a particular task. Referring here to Aristotle, Agamben writes:

[W]e say of the architect that he or she has the *potential* to build, of the poet that he or she has the *potential* to write poems. It is clear that this *existing* potentiality differs from the *generic* potentiality of the child. The child, Aristotle says, is potential in the sense that he must suffer an alteration (a becoming other) through learning. Whoever already possesses knowledge, by contrast, is not obliged to suffer an alteration; he is instead potential, Aristotle says, thanks to *hexis* [habit], a ‘having,’ on the basis of which he can also *not* bring his knowledge into actuality (*me energein*) by *not* making a work, for example. Thus the architect is potential insofar as he has the potential to not-build, the poet the potential to not-write poems.

(Agamben, 1999, p. 179)

Agamben focuses on Aristotle’s second kind of potentiality that implies both the ability to apply and to not-apply a particular knowledge or skill. While the student, *qua* child, could be said to have the first kind of potentiality (i.e., the generic potential to be able to acquire different kinds of knowledge and skills), as well as the second kind of potentiality (i.e., the potential to apply or not apply whatever skills she already has), the potentiality of the student, *qua* student, for Aristotle, would have to be her potential to learn and not-learn.

The reason why the question of potentiality is so important to Agamben, is that, for him, the question of potentiality is directly tied to that of human freedom. “[0]ther living beings,” he writes, “are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own

impotentiality. ” (ibid., p. 182) This means that our ability to do, that is, to apply our knowledge and our skills, is inextricably tied to our ability to not-do something, to not-apply our knowledge or skills. “The greatness—and also the abyss—of human potentiality,” Agamben writes, “is that it is first of all potential not to act.” And: “Here it is possible to see how the root of freedom is to be found in the abyss of potentiality.” (ibid., pp. 182-183). For Agamben, to be free (that is, to have the potential to do *and* to not-do) means “to be able to be in relation to one’s own privation” (ibid., p. 183).

As we have seen, the lack of the voice of the teacher is experienced by the students as a situation where no teaching occurs, and, thus, (by definition) no learning. Applying Agamben’s understanding of potentiality, the practice of philosophy could be said to provide students with the experience of being deprived of learning, which, in turn, allows them to experience their potential to learn and to not-learn, that is, the freedom to both acquire and to not-acquire new knowledge and skills. Rather than being stuck in the mode of learning, they experience the *impotentiality* to learn, and, thus, also first become fully aware of their true potential to learn as such—to become free to learn. In other words, doing philosophy is not about an outcome per se, but about (a fuller realization of) the kind of experience that is the precondition for any outcome at all.

2.6. Summary

In this chapter, I tried to show how my experience of engaging in different ways of doing philosophy, both as student and teacher, led me to seeing the lack of teacher facilitation during the conversation-component of my practice—what I have called the silence of the voice of the teacher—as what makes the unique quality of experience of the

practice possible. This raised the question of how a practice that—in its central feature—is no longer directed at any specific goal or outcome, can still be considered educationally valuable. As a first step toward conceptualizing the educational value of the experience, I used the concept of “wait time,” as an example of how the silence of the teacher has been previously described as pedagogically beneficial (i.e., as a tool to bring about certain educational outcomes). I then employed Agamben’s notion of impotentiality to show how the extended silence of the voice of the teacher in the practice of philosophy might be seen as educationally valuable beyond its pedagogical value. Conceiving of the practice as a realization of the experience of impotentiality, permitted me to describe the silence of the teacher as an expression of a capability (to teach and to not-teach), enabling the students (*qua* students) to experience their own capability to learn and to not learn—as a precondition for any learning to occur at all.

In the following chapters, I will temporarily put aside the question of the educational value of philosophy in education, and instead consider what might be seen as the defining feature of doing philosophy, in general (i.e., independent of its use in education). Drawing again from Agamben, I identify the experience of impotentiality of language, or *in-fancy*, as the defining feature the practice of philosophy (chapter 3). I then show how the idea of in-fancy is also contained in certain conceptions of education (chapter 4), concluding that the practice of philosophy (based on the experience of in-fancy), is uniquely positioned to realize what has also been described by some educational philosophers as a central aspect of education. After considering the role of in-fancy in existing approaches of philosophy with children (chapter 5), I return to the

question of the educational value, or *use*, of the practice of philosophy, at the classroom level (chapter 6), and, in schools and the society as a whole (chapter 7).

Chapter 3: In-fancy in Conceptions of the Practice of Philosophy

In its deepest intention, philosophy is a firm assertion of potentiality, the construction of an experience of the possible as such. Not thought but the potential to think, not writing but the white sheet is what philosophy refuses at all costs to forget.

(Agamben, *Potentialities*, p. 249)

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how, in my own practice, I gravitated toward increasingly less active facilitation in the conversation component based on the quality of experience that this lack of facilitation allowed for. I then presented the concept of “wait-time” as an example of how the experience made possible by the temporary silence of the voice of the teacher has previously been theorized as pedagogically beneficial. Finally, I showed how Agamben’s notion of im-potentiality provides us with a way to see the experience of an extended silence of the voice of the teacher as valuable, independent of its pedagogical benefits. Before returning to the question of the *educational* value of the practice, in chapter 5, in this chapter, I argue that the practice of philosophy (independent

of its role in education) can be shown to have as its defining feature the experience of in-fancy.²⁵

I begin by outlining what Agamben means by in-fancy, establishing that, for him, it is the experience of in-fancy that defines and constitutes the practice of philosophy. I go on to distinguish four facets of the experience of in-fancy. I then use this elaboration of the notion of in-fancy, to locate in-fancy in historical conceptions of the practice of philosophy, in order to lend support to the idea that in-fancy is a defining feature of the practice of philosophy and to gain a better understanding of the idea of in-fancy in its various manifestations (e.g., differences with regard to which of the facets are being emphasized). I look here specifically at Socratic philosophy, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Dewey, and Phenomenology, arguing that they all contain the experience of in-fancy (or aspects thereof) as what accounts for the practice of philosophy and what makes it valuable.

²⁵ My intention here is not to answer the question: What is philosophy?—a question that may indeed not have an answer. Gert Biesta (2012), for example, has pointed out the circular nature of the task of saying why we should do philosophy with children, given that we first need to answer the questions: “What is philosophy?”, and, “What can it achieve?” (ibid., p.137)—questions that, according to Biesta are both “impossible and inevitable” (ibid., p. 138), given that an answer to them is itself based on certain philosophical commitments, and, thus, already implies an idea of what philosophy is (or should be). Heidegger makes a similar point, in *What is Philosophy?* (1958), when he points out that to ask what something is we have to already know what it is, or at least be able to distinguish it from other things. In other words, we need to already have engaged in philosophy to be able to even ask what it is, which leads Heidegger to state: “Philosophy itself seems to be this circle” (WP, 43). But what we can do is to 1) acknowledge the circularity, and 2) find the least controversial way of entering the circle. “What is decisive,” Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* (2008), “is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way” (ibid., p. 195 [H 153]). The way I am trying to enter the circle in the right way, is by articulating what I see as the value of my experience with an activity that is generally referred to as doing philosophy, using Agamben’s conceptualization of the practice of philosophy to build on my own articulation, to then further support this articulation by showing how it aligns with other historical conceptions of the practice of philosophy.

3.2. In-fancy as the Defining Feature of the Practice of Philosophy

In-fancy is a central concept in Agamben's extensive oeuvre.²⁶ He first introduced the notion of in-fancy in *Stanzas* (1993b [1977]), where he refers to the tools depicted in Dürer's painting "Melencolia I" as "relics of a past on which is written the Edenic cipher of infancy (1993b, p. 26). But he first fully develops the concept in *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (2007 [1978]). After that it is featured most prominently in *Language and Death* (1991 [1982]) and in the chapter "The idea of infancy" in *The Idea of Prose* (1995). The centrality of in-fancy in Agamben's work, derives from its close proximity to the concepts of "experience," "time," "language," and, maybe the most central concept in Agamben's work, namely "potentiality." That Agamben should regard in-fancy, and not potentiality, as the defining feature of the practice of philosophy is not immediately obvious and requires some reflection on the relationship between infancy and potentiality in Agamben's thought.

The key to an understanding of the difference between potentiality and in-fancy is their respective relationship to language. In contrast to in-fancy, potentiality (and, thus, im-potentiality) is not (or at least not primarily) related to language. Rather, as we have already seen, for Agamben, true potentiality, or im-potentiality, is about a state of being able to do or be something, but not doing or being it, or, to put it differently, to have the ability to do or be something, but to not actualize that potentiality (e.g., being an architect who has the ability to build houses, but chooses not to do so). So im-potentiality here, is

²⁶ As I pointed out in the introduction, I divert from Agamben's spelling of *infancy*, rendering the term *in-fancy*, instead, to emphasize the fact that in-fancy refers to a state on the margins of language and not-language, rather than a state without speech or the ability to speak.

about not doing something that one has the ability to do. In-fancy (literally, not speaking, or not being able to speak), on the other hand, relates specifically to the ability to speak, that is, to have language. It could thus be said to be the specifically (and, for Agamben, paradigmatically) human kind of im-potentiality: that we can speak but that we don't have to speak, and that we don't have to speak in any particular way. So while im-potentiality is about the experience of a state of being able to do something, and to not have to do it, (i.e., about experiencing potentiality as such), in-fancy is about the experience of the potentiality of language as such.

Insofar as we are beings that have language, in-fancy, for Agamben, is not an ability that we can, or cannot have, or that needs to be learned or acquired to be realized.²⁷ Rather, for Agamben, in-fancy is constitutive for our very ability to speak, insofar as the transition from not speaking to speaking cannot be pre-determined for us to be able to speak at all. For him, this also means that there is a place (and time) of indistinguishability between not-language and language, mere voice and meaningful speech. This is why, for Agamben, in-fancy is present in every speech act, insofar as it always involves language and not-language, as well as a realm where the two are indistinct, and indistinguishable—making in-fancy a constitutive feature of what it means to be a human being as a being that has language. To argue for the value of experiencing

²⁷ Nor is it a developmental stage that needs to be overcome, or that we should return to, although it could be said to be something that can be preserved, insofar as he considers the life of the child as “a possibility, a potentiality that never exhausts itself in biographical facts and events, since it has no object other than itself. It is an absolute immanence that nevertheless *moves* and *lives*” (Agamben, “For A Philosophy of Infancy,” Elias Polizoes (trans.), 2001, p. 122).

in-fancy, then, is not saying that we need to create that experience, but that we that we should allow for the existing experience of in-fancy to be more fully realized.²⁸

To get a better sense of the idea of in-fancy, it is helpful to look at the particular context in which Agamben first introduces the concept in *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (2007). Referring to Husserl's statement that "we have no names" for our experience of time and "its relationship with the subject" (2007, p. 42)," Agamben asks: "Does a mute experience exist? Does an in-fancy of experience exist?" (ibid.). This is important for several reasons: It means that what motivates Agamben to introduce in-fancy is the question of the possibility of a certain kind of experience that he sees as being in danger of being lost. And because this means that, for him, this question is directly related to that of the limits of our language (de la Durantaye, 2009), and the particular kind of experience that exists (more or less realized) at the margin between language and not language (i.e., the ineffable). In other words, the question of the possibility of an experience of the ineffable is, for Agamben, directly tied to the question of our experience of language. For Agamben, it is that margin where we experience the limits of the potentiality of language, where we can also experience the im-potentiality (or pure potentiality) of language that, for him, is the defining feature of a being that has language.

The reason why the realization of dwelling in, and of more fully realizing that state is so important for Agamben, is that, for him, the experience of in-fancy (*qua* im-

²⁸ While, for Agamben, this experience can be brought about in other ways (e.g., poetry), philosophy might be seen as privileged in that it could be said to be *primarily* about a realization of the experience of infancy as such.

potentiality of language) is the source of our ability to divert from established ways of speaking (and, thus, thinking and acting). As such, it is, for him, also the source of whatever freedom is possible for human beings. So we could say that, for Agamben, the experience of in-fancy allows for a fuller realization of a defining aspect of our humanity, or human nature—only that, for him, human nature consists in the fact that we do not have a particular nature. This is what Agamben means when he writes that “there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize” (1993a, p. 43). And he adds: “There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this something is not an essence nor properly a thing: It is the simple fact of one’s existence as possibility or potentiality” (ibid.). What the realization of in-fancy makes possible (consists in), then, is not only the experience of the potentiality of language, but also the *realization and experience of im-potentiality as such*—as a way to more fully realize our human nature (our “existence as possibility or potentiality”).

3.3. The Value of the Experience of In-fancy

As we have seen, Agamben sees the practice of philosophy as a way to realize our human nature, which consists in not having a human nature (that is, of existing as the possibility of potentiality). But, assuming we agree with this characterization, why would the realization of this (defining) aspect of our humanity be desirable? Given that Agamben does not understand human nature as something that is directed at a particular state in the future, but rather as something that manifests itself whenever we use language (speak), it is about more fully realizing a constitutive feature of who we, as beings that have language, already are. But because this state is—by definition—not determined in

any way, it cannot be said to be valuable in relation to a particular goal or outcome, but has to be considered valuable merely based on the quality of experience of being in that state. Thus, we have to understand what Agamben sees as the particular quality of the experience of in-fancy, and why we should think of being in that state as inherently desirable.

There is maybe no better way to understand what makes the experience of in-fancy valuable, for Agamben, than to look at the experiences that shaped his view of the nature and value of (the practice of) philosophy (as the experience in its in-fancy). I want to refer here, in particular, to two experiences Agamben recounts in two interviews (1999; 2004), referenced by de la Durantaye (2009). The first experience refers to a number of seminars with Heidegger, in which Agamben participated between 1966 and 1969 (the first one, when he was 24 years old). About this experience, de la Durantaye writes:

[Agamben] described the seminars as much more than a simple forum ‘in which one learns things’. They formed instead what he called a *constellation*: a coming together of elements resulting in something truly unexpected. This unexpected thing was, simply, philosophy. As he would later remark, it was during those seminars that, for him, ‘philosophy became possible’. (2009, p. 2).

The second experience is described by Agamben in the following way, again as quoted in de la Durantaye:

When asked about the beginning of his career Agamben once remarked that he started ‘like everyone else’ by simply ‘wanting to write’. This uncertain desire—‘wanting to write’—was, as he came to realize, not the desire ‘to write this or that specific work or novel’. It was, instead, something much vaster—something more ‘senseless and strange [insensata e strana],’ but also ‘more profound’ than any set goal or aim. (ibid. p. 3)

And he goes on:

In a phrase that presents the central term of his philosophy, Agamben remarked that ‘wanting to write is the desire to experience potentiality’. The coming together of these two things—wanting to write and an experience of potentiality—is the common thread that links his diverse works. (ibid.)

So here we have two experiences: The first one is about engaging in a communal practice of philosophy that, according to Agamben was not about learning things, but about “a coming together of elements resulting in something truly unexpected” as what accounted for the quality of the experience. The second one is about the experience of writing itself, without the goal or aim to write something in particular, as an experience of potentiality (used in an emphatic sense). Juxtaposing these two experiences, allows us to make a connection between philosophy and potentiality/in-fancy: Both experiences are about not-doing something: not learning, not writing something in particular—allowing for something “unexpected” and “senseless and strange” to become possible, namely the

experience of potentiality itself. And, maybe more importantly, in both cases, it is about the experience of the potentiality of language: spoken language (communication) in the first experience, and writing, in the second. So both experiences are not just about potentiality (in general), but about what de la Durantaye refers to the “potentiality of language” (ibid., p. 91), or, what Agamben calls “infancy”²⁹. So based on these examples, we see again how when Agamben talks about philosophy as the experience of (true) potentiality, he is really referring to the experience of in-fancy as the properly (uniquely) human way of being in a state of im-potentiality: the im-potentiality of language. And rather than deriving its value from the realization of human nature, it is ultimately the inherently enjoyable nature of the experience of engaging in philosophy, and writing, that makes these activities valuable to Agamben. It is for this reason that Agamben’s account of his experiences with philosophy and writing, is not secondary, but crucial for an understanding of the what he sees as the nature and value of the experience of in-fancy: To understand why activities that allow for the experience of in-fancy should be regarded as valuable, we have to have had the experience ourselves. And what Agamben is doing, is ultimately just finding ways to articulate the nature of the experience, and what about it made it enjoyable or meaningful to him, in order to encourage others to seek out activities that allow for such an experience. (And part of doing this is to articulate in what sense the

²⁹ The full quote reads: “*Infancy* is a term that, for Agamben, is intimately linked to *potentiality*. Unlike the potentiality of Aristotle’s sleeping geometer, a child’s countless possibilities or potentialities are yet to be developed and may or may not be realized. Agamben is interested in the potentiality of language, and the term infancy allows him to pose a question about potentiality independent of actualization” (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 91).

experience of in-fancy allows us to more fully realize a constitutive feature of our humanity).

Having clarified the relationship between potentiality and in-fancy, and why, for Agamben, in-fancy (i.e., im-potentiality of language) and not im-potentiality (in general) is the defining feature of philosophy, and, having traced the idea of in-fancy to certain biographical experiences, I will now provide more explicit textual evidence for Agamben's understanding of in-fancy as the defining feature of philosophy, and the philosophical.

In the following two passages, from "The Idea of Language" [1984] and "Bartleby, or On Contingency [1993]," both in *Potentialities* (1999), Agamben refers specifically to the experience of in-fancy (*qua* potentiality of language) as the defining feature of the practice of philosophy:

The task of philosophy is therefore to be assumed exactly at the point at which contemporary thought seems to abandon it. If it is true that the fly must begin by seeing the glass in which it is enclosed, what can such a vision mean? What does it mean to see and to expose the limits of language? (For the fly, the glass is not a *thing* but rather *that through which* it sees things). Can there be a discourse that, without being a metalanguage or sinking into the unsayable, says language itself and exposes its limits? (1999, p. 46)

In its deepest intention, philosophy is a firm assertion of potentiality, the construction of an experience of the possible as such. Not thought but the potential to think, not writing but the white sheet is what philosophy refuses at all costs to forget. (ibid., p. 249)

So here we can see that, in both cases, the idea of philosophy as an experience is directly tied to language as an activity that “says language itself and exposes its limits,” and that is about “not writing but the white sheet ... [that] philosophy refuses at all costs to forget.” In other words, in both cases the practice of philosophy is about experiencing true potentiality through the realization of a particular aspect of the use of, and relation to language (speech, thinking, and writing). For him, that experience is made possible through the practice of philosophy (including his own work as a philosopher) by dwelling in that realm of in-fancy, on the margin between “metalanguage,” and the “unsayable” that is, a realm where we become aware of a radical openness with regard to possible expressions (infinite expressions of possible truths), due to the contingency of language. And it is that particular experience of a state of in-fancy itself (whether experienced alone or with others), not any specific “goal or aim,” that accounts for its unique value.

It is somewhat misleading to speak of the experience of in-fancy as a *feature* of doing philosophy, given that, for Agamben, experiencing in-fancy *is* doing philosophy (and vice versa). In other words, for Agamben, it is the experience of in-fancy itself that makes something philosophical—whether that experience occurs while writing or reading a poem, creating or looking at a work of art, or engaging in a speech-act. As he has put it

in a recent interview: “Philosophy is not a discipline. Philosophy is an intensity”³⁰—which is also the reason why, for Agamben, “philosophy does not have a content purely its own” (cited in de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 9).³¹ If we apply this to the two experiences that critically shaped Agamben’s view of philosophy, we can say that it is a certain kind of intensity that Agamben must have experienced in the Heidegger seminars: the experience of the occurrence of something unexpected, or, maybe, the experience that the occurrence of something unexpected was possible. And something similar could be said about his experience writing without any goal or aim, as an experience of the “senseless and strange,” or the possibility of the “senseless and strange.”

We can also gather this broad understanding of philosophy as a sense of radical openness from what he refers to as “the genuine philosophical element,” not only in philosophical texts, but “in any work, be it a work of art, one of science, or one of thought,” consisting in “its capacity for being developed” (2009, pp. 7-8). He elaborates on this idea elsewhere, writing that “the properly philosophical element in any work, be it a work of scholarship, of literature, or of art, is that which goes unsaid therein, and thereby possesses a possibility for development” (cited in de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 9). In other words, we could say that, for Agamben, what makes any work (and, we may add,

³⁰ Originally in Spanish: “‘La filosofía no es una disciplina, la filosofía es una intensidad,” from an interview in “El cultural,” Giorgio Agamben: “La filosofía no es una disciplina, la filosofía es una intensidad”—25/06/2014.

³¹ De la Durantaye writes: “As we saw earlier, Agamben’s idea of vocation is an open one and finds an essential corollary in his idea of philosophy. He characterizes philosophy neither as a list of questions to answer nor as a set of methods to employ. Because philosophy is more than a body of ideas and doctrines, methods and forms, treatises and texts, it can be, for him, as little circumscribed as the desire to think, write, or act, and for this reason he will claim that ‘philosophy does not have a content purely its own’.” (2009, p. 9).

any practice or activity) philosophical, is that it contains an element of openness, that is, something that is not expressed (remains un-actualized), and therefore allows for the experience of im-potentiality, or in-fancy.³²

It is clear from the above that Agamben's idea of the practice of philosophy, and the philosophical, is much broader than, and does not coincide with, what is traditionally understood by doing philosophy. As de la Durantaye writes: "For Agamben, the philosophical element—rich in potentiality—is that which, while present, goes unstated in a work and is thereby left for others to read between the lines and formulate in [sic] their own" (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 9). He adds that this is also true for Agamben's own books, so when he writes that "[i]t is as though each completed work contained within it something that went unsaid and which demands to be taken up and developed" (ibid.).³³ And: "For this reason Agamben writes that 'to think ... means ... to experience the pure potentiality of thought,' as well as that an experience of potentiality is 'the foundation of our rationality, our knowing and speaking being'." (ibid.).

But while it is clear that Agamben's idea of philosophy is broader than any traditional understanding of what it means to do philosophy, and may even seem antithetical to a traditional idea of philosophy or what counts as philosophical, the

³² "For this reason philosophy must necessarily have its beginning in 'marvel,' it must, that is, always already leave behind habit, in order to be able to return there, walking through negativity and absolving if from its demonic scission. A philosopher is one who, having been surprised by language, having thus abandoned his habitual dwelling place in the word, must now return to where language already happened to him. He must 'surprise the surprise,' be at home in the marvel and in the division. When it wishes to return to its arche, philosophy can only grasp the taking place of language in a Voice, in a negative; that is, the daimon itself as ethos, the scission itself as the appearance (*Erscheinung*) of the Absolute. That which it has to grasp is, after all, simply a dispossession and a flight" (1991, pp. 93-94)

³³ See also de la Durantaye's discussion of the idea of "incompletion" (2009, p. 383ff.).

question is whether—even in Agamben’s own understanding of the philosophical—a traditional notion of the practice of philosophy (involving language, and some kind of experimentation with concepts) should not be seen as privileged with regard to the realization of the experience of in-fancy. In what sense this may be the case, will become clearer after looking at some of the defining facets of Agamben’s understanding of in-fancy in the following section.

3.4. Facets of the Experience of In-fancy

Having demonstrated, that, for Agamben, doing philosophy is about the experience of in-fancy, I will now distinguish several of its facets. This will allow me to give a fuller sense of what Agamben means by in-fancy, beyond what has already been said about the nature of the experience. It will also make it clearer why a more or less traditional format of the practice may be privileged in allowing for the experience. And, finally, it will aid us in locating aspects of in-fancy in various conceptions of the practice of philosophy, in the subsequent section.

We can distinguish the following four facets in Agamben’s notion of the experience of in-fancy: 1) A state of indistinguishability of language and not-language that can neither be reduced to one of its components, nor (dialectically, or otherwise) synthesized or annulled (*aufgehoben*). 2) An experience of the contingency of language, that is, the realization that there is no necessary connection between words and their referents, allowing for a radical openness with regard to possible ways of speaking (and, thus, thinking, and acting). 3) A particular kind of temporality that is made possible by a lack of directionality. 4) A certain type of communality, made possible by fact that

language depends on a community of speakers and that the way language is experienced in such a community also shapes what kind of communality is possible in that community. In the following, I will consider these four facets of the experience of in-fancy, in turn.

3.4.1. Indistinguishability. For Agamben, language and not-language are indistinguishable in our everyday experience. There is never just language, because without *experience* (here used by Agamben to refer to the non-linguistic aspects of experience), there could not be (human) language. Without *experience*, he writes, “language would undoubtedly be [merely] a ‘game’ in Wittgenstein’s sense, its truth coinciding with its correct usage according to logical rules” (2007a, p. 58). For Agamben, it is the very fact that we can experience in-fancy (as the transcendental limit of language) that “rules out language as being in itself totality and truth” (ibid.). But, given that pure experience, that is, experience without language, cannot be experienced by beings that have language, an experience of the limits of language (that there is language, that we can speak), is only possible if we assume a state in which we are both still in language, and no longer (or not yet) in language. It is in this sense in which Agamben refers to in-fancy as the threshold or margin between not-language and language. He writes, for example, that

the concept of infancy is ... an attempt to think through these limits [the limits of language] in a direction other than that of the vulgarly ineffable.

The ineffable, the un-said, are in fact categories which belong exclusively to human language ... they express its invincible power of presupposition,

the unsayable being precisely what language must presuppose in order to signify. (2007, p. 4)

In other words, the limits of language cannot be experienced outside of language (in the purely ineffable), but only within language, through an experience of the relationship between language and not-linguistically mediated experience. “Infancy,” he writes, “finds its logical place in a presentation of the relationship between language and experience” (ibid.). And, playing here with the fact that “experimentum” is the origin of both experience and experiment, he writes that the experience of language is an “*experimentum linguae* ... in which the limits of language are to be found not outside of language, in the direction of its referent, but in an experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference” (ibid., p. 6). The idea of in-fancy, for Agamben, “is staked on the possibility that there is an experience of language which is not merely a silence or a deficiency of names, but one whose logic can be indicated, whose site and formula can be designated, at least up to a point” (ibid., p. 7). This experience (of the margining between language and not language), is only possible within the context of meaningful speech. So rather than an actual place (as the terms “margin,” and “threshold” seem to suggest), the experience of in-fancy refers to the indistinguishable mix of not-language and language, between the ineffable and meaningful speech, in our experience as embodied beings that have language.³⁴

³⁴ This facet of the notion of in-fancy, can be seen in relation to other efforts in the history of philosophy, of trying to think everyday experience as underlying/preceding the separation not-language and language, such as Wittgenstein’s notion of *Lebensform* (form of life), Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), Heidegger’s *Welt/Alltäglichkeit* (world, everydayness), and Cavell’s idea of *the Ordinary*. What distinguishes Agamben’s notion of in-fancy, is that he doesn’t privilege either a sphere of pure experience in the form of *phenomena* (Husserl) or *being* (Heidegger), or language (Wittgenstein), and instead thinks experience as an

3.4.2. Contingency. For Agamben, being in a state of in-fancy (indistinguishability of not-language and language) also means that language appears as a pure potentiality to mean, without meaning anything in particular. This accounts for the fact that what we end up saying (and how we are saying it) is not pre-determined—we don't have to speak at all, and we don't have to speak in a particular way. Agamben writes: “[O]ther living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality” (1999, p. 182, emphasis in original). So, even though we are initiated into a community of speakers when we learn our native language (and that also means the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic peculiarities/limitations of that language), what we are able to do within those limitations is not pre-determined (according to Agamben). But this also means that there is no necessary relationship between what we are saying, and what we are saying it about. Insofar as this lack of necessity or contingency of language (that we don't have to speak in a certain way; that we can divert from established ways of speaking) can be experienced, it is one facet of the experience of in-fancy.

3.4.3. Temporality. Another facet of the experience of in-fancy, closely related to the experience of the contingency of language, is a particular experience of time, or temporarily. As already mentioned, the experience of the contingency of language, can be seen as the source of deviating from established ways of speaking. This is because questioning the necessary relationship between language and things, also means

indistinguishable mix of the two, as part of the act of language (see, also Agamben, 2007, p. 35f.). While, there are elements of in-fancy in all of the authors mentioned above (see, for example, my discussion of Husserl, below), Cavell's notion of the ordinary may come closest to Agamben's idea of experience.

questioning norms, beliefs, and values contained in our language, that form the basis of our belief in the existence of necessary, or ultimate goals of our endeavors (be they personal, historical, philosophical, or educational). An experience of the lack ultimate goals, and directionality (the need to pursuit specific goals), more generally, can, in turn lead to a less chronological experience of time, that is, one that places more emphasizes on the moment (*kairos*, *Jetztzeit*, or what Agamben calls Messianic time).

It is important to emphasize that, given that in-fancy is an experience of both not-language, and language, within the act of language, this experience is not about becoming lost in the moment, or an experience of the ineffable as such, but about the moment of transition from the ineffable to meaningful language in the act of language. So there is a movement, or momentum, in this idea of messianic time. This is because, for Agamben, the time of the now can only be experienced in the context of chronological time—as an experience on (and of) the threshold of *kairos* and *chronos*. In *The Time that Remains* (2005), for example, Agamben writes about Paul’s understanding of the messianic:

For Paul, the messianic is not a third eon situated between two times; but rather, it is a caesura that divides the division between times and introduces a remnant, a zone of indecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past. (2005, p. 74)

So just like there cannot be either only language or the purely ineffable, in terms of the experience of time, it is never just the one or the other. But as is the case with in-fancy, where the acknowledgement of the ineffable allows for the experience of in-fancy, it is

the presence of the *kairos* (or more *kairos*) within chronological time that is decisive.

Commenting on a quote from the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (“*chronos* is that in which there is *kairos*, and *kairos* is that in which there is little *chronos*”), Agamben writes that

the messianic world, is not another world, but the secular world itself, with a slight adjustment, a meager difference. But this ever so slight difference, which results from my having grasped my disjointedness with regard to chronological time, is, in every way, a decisive one. (2005, pp. 68-69)

With regard to in-fancy, we can say that insofar as the ineffable represents the Kairos, and language chronological time, a fuller realization of infancy (that includes the ineffable) also allows for more of Kairos, and, thus, for of a fuller realization of time as Messianic time. Just like Agamben’s introduction of the idea of in-fancy is about fending off the destruction of (genuine) experience, in relation to language (synchronic), the introduction of the idea of Messianic time is equally meant to preserve genuine experience, in relation to time (diachronic). The reason this is so important for Agamben is that, as is the case with the experience of in-fancy in general, what is at state here, for him, is nothing less than the potential for human happiness (see, for example, 2007, p. 115).

3.4.4. Communality. Because infancy is an experience of the potentiality of language, and language is by its very nature communal (both in terms of what makes it possible, and its realization/execution), the question of community, or communality, is not external to the question of the nature of the experience of in-fancy. Rather, the question of what kind of community is made possible by a fuller realization of in-fancy is

essential to our understanding of what Agamben means by the experience of in-fancy itself. Agamben states this clearly when he writes: “The first outcome of the *experimentum linguae*, therefore, is a radical revision of the very idea of Community” (2007, p. 10). For Agamben, this means that just like there cannot be language without in-fancy, there cannot be communication without in-fancy. So, for him, community, both in the basic sense of an ability to communicate, and in an emphatic sense, of forming a true community, or, what he calls a *coming community*, requires a communal experience of in-fancy, that is, a communal dwelling on the margin between voice/experience and language/truth. He writes:

Among beings who would always already be enacted ... there could not be any community but only coincidences and factual partitions. We can communicate with others only through what in us—as much as in others—has remained potential, and any communication (as Benjamin perceives for language) is first of all communication not of something in common but of communicability itself. (2000, p. 10)

What he means, is that community (used here in an emphatic sense) is, strictly speaking, only possible if the members of the community are never completely enacted, that is, if they remain potential (i.e., in a state of im-potentiality). Such a community, according to Agamben, interrupts the focus on actualization of certain aims or purposes articulated in established ways of speaking, and, thus, allows for the experience of contingency and indeterminacy at the heart of the community.

Having established that Agamben conceives of the experience of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy, and having outlined the constitutive facets of Agamben's notion of in-fancy, I will now locate the experience of in-fancy in several prominent conceptions of the practice of philosophy, in order to lend further support to the idea that in-fancy can indeed be seen as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy.

3.5. Locating In-fancy in Conceptions of the Practice of Philosophy

The following Agamben-quote about deriving a particular idea of time from the Western cultural tradition, might be equally applied to the way I intend to use the idea of in-fancy, in this section: "The elements for a different concept of time," he writes in *Infancy and History*, "lie scattered among the folds and shadows of the Western cultural tradition," and, he continues, "[w]e need only to elucidate these, so that they may emerge as the bearers of a message which is meant for us and which it is our task to verify" (2007, p. 110). In much the same way, I seek to locate the idea of in-fancy in conceptions of the practice of philosophy, in the (Western) philosophical tradition.³⁵ While I focus here on representatives of a tradition in the history of philosophy that emphasizes the practice itself over the development and proliferation of doctrines, I believe that the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy can be generalized (independent of whether the practice itself, or a possible result or product is seen as what makes it ultimately valuable). Focusing on in-fancy in those conceptions of philosophy

³⁵ While, except for some references, my investigation is limited to Western thinkers, it could easily be expanded to include non-Western, and, in particular, Eastern thinkers. Given the similarity between the ideas expressed here, and, for example, Buddhist philosophy, might even be seen as an implicit validation of that tradition. The only reason such similarities are not spelled out in more detail, is the limited space.

that see the practice in itself as what constitutes philosophy, serves both, as a support for such positions, and, as a genealogy of Agamben's notion of in-fancy.

In the following, I trace the experience of in-fancy in conceptions of the practice of philosophy, from the Socratic conception of philosophy as a communal experimentation with concepts, to Nietzsche's idea of philosophy as an experience of the *unhistorical*, based on an acknowledgement of the conventionality of language, to Dewey's notion of the *experience of the empirical unity of opposites*, and, finally, to phenomenological perspectives on the practice of philosophy as an experience of a radical openness to both the phenomena and their articulation.

3.5.1. In-fancy in Socratic philosophy. In this section, I argue that in-fancy should be seen as a central tenet of a Socratic practice of philosophy. To support this characterization, I draw from the work of German philosopher Michael Hampe (2014), who highlights those aspects of Socratic philosophy that align with the facets of the experience of in-fancy, outlined above. For Hampe, Socratic philosophy represents an example, and prototype, of what he calls *non-doctrinal* philosophy. In contrast to *doctrinal* philosophy (which he sees as an extension of Pre-Socratic Philosophy that led to the great philosophical systems and the natural sciences), non-doctrinal philosophy is defined by not being directed at developing and propagating doctrines based on assertions about the world. As such, he sees Socratic philosophy as a rejection of the idea that making assertions is a privileged form of "reacting" to the world—an idea that is replaced with a view of philosophy as a communal practice that represents a particular life form,

an idea that is also reflected in Hadot's idea of philosophy as a *way of life* that revolves around *spiritual exercises* (Hadot, 1995; 2002).³⁶

At the heart of Hampe's interpretation of Socratic philosophy as a particular model of doing philosophy is his notion of the *Socratic Community of Perpetual Conversation* [*Sokratische Gemeinschaft des unendlichen Gesprächs*] (hereafter, SCPC). For him, the key feature of the SCPC is the experience of the contingency of language. What allows for this experience, according to Hampe, is that the members of the SCPC engage in a communal examination of assertions that leads them to realize that it is impossible to reach conclusions about certain questions.³⁷ This, in turn, leads to the realization that there is no necessary connection between words and things and that different views about the world are in fact based on differences in the way we talk about things. What makes the SCPC unique, for Hampe, is that its members continue the conversation, in spite of their realization that there are only new and different ways of talking about the world, without a final result or product. In other words, the practice derives its value not from a possible outcome, but from the particular experience it allows for.

³⁶ Hampe himself acknowledges the paradoxical nature of saying that assertions should not be seen as a privileged way to react to the world, is itself an assertion. "Non-doctrinal philosophy," he writes, "is neither descriptive metaphysics nor pragmatism. Other than those, it ends in a paradox (2014, p. 31). The reason this is so, is that the assertion is based on an experience that itself cannot be represented by assertions or arguments"—leading to "the assertion that ... all general expressions, insofar as they contain general concepts and not only names, indexical, and deictic terms, are unable to capture [*zurückfallen hinter*] the concrete experience of the particulars [*Einzelheiten*] of the world" (ibid.).

³⁷ That Plato himself thinks of the contingency of language in this way can be inferred from a passage in his dialogue *Kratylos*, where one of the characters states: "for any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as correct the old ... for there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users" (*Kratylos*, Plato, 383a-3384d; see also Marsal, 2011, p. 25).

For Hampe, what makes this experience valuable is that it makes us realize that using language to organize the world according to what he calls *general patterns* (*allgemeine Muster*), is only one way of “reacting” to the world. Another way, for him, is to think of the world as made up of *particulars* (*Einzelnes*) and *particular beings* (*Einzelwesen*) (2014, 247 ff.). What he means by this is simply that instead of using language to create or apply general patterns that organize our experience in ways that makes them repeatable, it is possible to conceive of each of our individual experiences as a unique, and, thus, unrepeatable event. For Hampe, the realization, by the members of the SCPC, that we cannot come to a final consensus with regard to certain essential questions, such as how we should lead our lives, enables them to realize the relative value of using general patterns, and to appreciate the experience of things in their particularity. The reason Hampe considers this significant, is that it enables (and encourages) us to divert from established ways of speaking and to react to our environment in new ways. For him, this ability is the precondition for leading what he calls a *felicitous life* (*gelingendes Leben*) (2014, p. 375), by which he means a life that is neither about a specific outcome (a better life in the future), nor some form of emancipation or liberation, but rather a life that maintains the ability to experience things in their particularity, or *first-timeness* (*Erstmaligkeit*) (ibid., p. 355). For him, experiencing things for the first time (or, *as if* for the first time) is inherently pleasurable, and what makes a life that includes such experiences *felicitous*. What accounts for the significance of the SCPC, for Hampe, independent of whether or not it is an accurate representation of the historical figure of Socrates and his followers, is that it serves as an example of a form of life that

does not derive its value from being directed at specific outcomes, and, thus, exemplifies the “possibility for individuals and communities to be about more than asserting, producing, and acquiring” (2014, p. 102).³⁸

But rather than being only about a radical openness with regard to ways of linguistic expression (as happens also in literature), for Hampe, doing philosophy implies using arguments that include assertions about the world. While it is similar, in this regard, to scientific inquiry, in the practice of (non-doctrinal) philosophy assertions or arguments are not used to develop a doctrine, that is, a system of statements that claims to represent a particular truth about the world. Rather, their use helps us to realize the limits (and the limited usefulness) of our ability to make assertions and create doctrines, given that this realization is only possible if we engage in the kind of conversation that assumes the possibility of making assertions (truths about the world), as opposed to a conversation that consists merely in telling stories without any claim of how things really are. In other words, there is an intimation of truth in the SCPC that allows for a realization of the usefulness of expressing, questioning, and comparing assertions about the world, while at the same time realizing their limited validity (the lack of ultimate truths).

Another facet of the experience of in-fancy that we find expressed in Hampe’s depiction of Socratic philosophy, is the indistinguishability of language and not-language, and the kind of community this makes possible. As we have already seen, according to Hampe, the experience of the contingency of language in the SCPC makes it into a

³⁸ In addition, Hampe sees it as a possible segue to another, in his view equally utopian—but no less desirable—form of life, namely that of falling silent—which he considers as another possible response to the particularity (and ultimate unsayability) of the world (*ibid.*, p. 428).

community that moves away from general patterns, and toward the (experience and articulation of) of things in their particularity. What this also means is that the community is not only based on language and linguistic discourse, but could be said to form at an ontologically more basic level of experience. Referring here to Cavell's concept of *the ordinary* (2014, p. 201ff.), Hampe describes a dimension of experience where, as is the case for the experience of in-fancy, language and not-language are not (yet) distinguished. According to Hampe, if it is possible to conceive of the world as made up of particulars (instead of general patterns), we need to assume a dimension of experience that is (ontologically) more basic than purely linguistically-mediated experience.³⁹ This, in turn, allows for a shared, communal experience of openness with regard to possible articulations of our experience that corresponds to Agamben's idea of a true community as being one whose members are in a state of in-fancy.⁴⁰

It should be pointed out that, for Hampe, one of the things that makes the SCPC possible, is the particular role of Socrates, as someone who claims to know that he doesn't know. This is significant, for Hampe, insofar as it allows the members of the SCPC to "realize that they also do not possess a doctrine that they could use to orient their lives, which, in turn, is what allows them to become the 'free shapers' [*freie*

³⁹ One of the reasons, he believes that it makes sense to assume the existence of such a dimension, is that without it, we could not be able to share situations with other living beings that do not have language (e.g., babies, and animals). While, for adult humans, language plays an important role in the way we experience the situation, that the situation can be shared at all, and that there can be different accounts of the experience of the situation, suggests that the experience of the situation itself needs to contain more than only linguistically mediated features.

⁴⁰ Rancière expresses a similar sentiment, when he writes: "The principal service that man can expect from man depends on that faculty of intercommunicating their pleasure and pain, hopes and fears, in order to be moved reciprocally: '... The exercise of that power is at once the sweetest of our pleasures and the most demanding of our needs.'" (1989, p. 72).

Gestalter] of their own lives” (2014, p. 94-95). About Socrates’ claim that “I know that I don’t know,” he writes that “[a]s an assertion ... this phrase remains implausible” (ibid., p. 95). And he continues: “It is more of a realization that happens when we engage in examining the assertions other people make and that we ourselves make, in order to realize that there is no knowledge that we can use to orient our lives” (ibid., p. 95), and: “The knowledge of not-knowing [*das Wissen des Nichtwissens*] consists in knowing that there is no general theory of the good life, whether individual or communal” (ibid., p. 96). While we may say that Socrates’ knowledge of his own ignorance should itself be regarded as a kind of knowledge that can be taught (Rancière, 1989), Hampe believes that instead of thinking of this as knowledge in the traditional sense, Socrates should be seen as someone who reacts to existing assertions (assumed knowledge) by engaging in an exemplary behavior (questioning assertions and presumed certainties). This kind of (exemplary) behavior prompts/initiates a certain kind of community that needs Socrates (as a teacher) only insofar as he is an example of a teacher that has nothing to teach.⁴¹

Lastly, we can find a certain kind of temporality in the Socratic practice of philosophy that corresponds to the experience of time in a state of in-fancy (messianic time). Key to the experience of time in the SCPC, are the notions of death and eternity.

⁴¹ See also Kohan, also with regard to the relevance of this idea later in this investigation: “In the apology, ‘he [Socrates] claims never to have been a teacher of anyone’ ... and yet ‘those who have learned with me’ will continue doing what he does. Socrates affirms, then, a sort of pedagogical scandal: the idea of a pedagogical situation in which the student learns without a teacher. What Socrates helps us think here is that there is no necessary causality, nor even directionality between teacher and learner, or the acts of teaching and learning. Someone does not teach but others learn with him. Someone learns but does not learn what he learns from someone who teaches it. What Socrates helps us to question is the pedagogical dogma that what a student learns is in the teacher, and is somehow transmitted to, or made to appear, in the learner through a certain behavior or even a disposition of the teacher” (Kohan, 2012, p. 181).

When Socrates states that philosophy is about learning how to die, we could understand this as saying that engaging in philosophy makes chronological time inoperable, and, thus, takes away our fear of death as the end of the chronological time of our lives. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates states: “In truth, then, Simmias ... the true philosopher studies to die, and to him of all men is death least terrible” (1951, p. 13). Based on Hampe’s depiction of the Socratic community as one that is engaged in a perpetual, or endless (*endlos*) conversation, we can interpret this to mean that the practice of philosophy is about engaging in an infinite quest for meaning, which also means that, in a certain sense, we partake in the infinite, because linear time (directedness toward goals or purposes in the future) is being disrupted (made inoperable) and suspended. So we could say that what Socrates means when he says that philosophy helps us learn how to die is that we have learned to be in a state that is not defined by being directed at (or, rather, that is defined by not being directed at) future goals or accomplishments.

It is in a similar sense that Hampe refers to Socrates and his followers as having thought up an existence that is no longer oriented toward theory as a way of the domination of nature. Instead, they “see theorizing ... as an instrument ... only insofar as it leads directly to a good life” (2014, p. 415). And, because they are “no longer interested in self-preservation,” they are no longer intimidated, and steered in their reactions to the world, by the threat of death. “Strictly speaking, Hampe concludes, “the philosophical community of those who engage in a free or open exchange is a community of disembodied souls” (ibid.). Expressed in Agambenian terms, we could say that the experience of infinite possibilities of expression allows for an experience of the eternal,

in the present.⁴² The idea of a temporality, implied here, finally, could be said to correspond to the temporality of the experience of in-fancy, insofar as it emphasizes the eternal quality of the experience, made possible by the openness to infinitely possible articulations of our ideas, that could be said to allow for an experience of Messianic time, that is, of the present, *as if* the Messiah (here: death, eternity) had already arrived.

To summarize, what I hope to have established in this section, is that Socratic philosophy contains facets of the experience of in-fancy. In particular, we find the experience of the contingency of language, aspects of the idea of the indistinguishability of language and not-language, an emphatic notion of community, and a non-chronological experience of time. In terms of the value of this experience, Hampe refers to the experience of things in their particularity (first-timeness), which corresponds to Agamben's idea of the experience of in-fancy as an inherently desirable (pleasurable) state based on a radical openness toward possible ways of articulating and sharing our experiences. What distinguishes this practice as philosophical, is that it contains an intimation of truth (use of assertions, and arguments) that allows for an experience of the relative validity of truth, an experience that is made possible by the figure of Socrates, who functions as an example of not-knowing.

⁴² We find this thought also expressed in a passage from Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life*, where he specifically refers to a certain temporality as characteristic for the practice of philosophy: "[T]he works which philosophy has consecrated cannot be harmed; no age will destroy them, no age reduce them; the following and each succeeding age will but increase the reverence for them ... [The philosopher] alone is freed from the limitations of the human race; all ages serve him as if a god. Has some time passed by? This he embraces by recollection. Is time present? This he uses. Is it still to come? This he anticipates. He makes his life long by combining all times into one. (Seneca, 1932, p. 339)

3.5.2. Nietzsche: conventionality of language, and the unhistorical. In this section, I reveal in what sense all four facets of the idea of in-fancy can also be located in Nietzsche's understanding of the practice of philosophy: an experience of the contingency of language, an experience of time, reflected in his concept of the "unhistorical," and a conception of communality, based on the idea of a state of indistinguishability of language and not-language. I will touch on each of these facets, in turn.

While Nietzsche does not primarily think of doing philosophy in communal terms, his notion of the practice of philosophy can certainly be seen as an experimentation with concepts that leads to an experience of the contingency of language. In "Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1959), he expresses the idea of the conventionality of language, and the language-dependent nature of truth, in the following way:

[B]ecause man, out of need and boredom, wants to exist socially, herd-fashion, he requires a peace pact and he endeavors to banish at least the very crudest bellum omni contra omnes from his world. This peace pact brings with it something that looks like the first step toward the attainment of this enigmatic urge for truth. For now that is fixed which henceforth shall be "truth"; that is, a regularly valid and obligatory designation of things is invented, and this linguistic legislation also furnishes the first laws of truth: for it is here that the contrast between truth and lie first originates. (1959, p. 44)

So here Nietzsche states very clearly that truth, understood as the correspondence between language and things, is based entirely on convention, and that the idea of a necessary connection between words and things (“the obligatory designation of things”) is an invention intended to prevent society from a war of all against all. Truth, for him, is a “mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations,” meaning that truths contain “not a single point that is true in itself, real, and binding” (ibid.). And elsewhere he writes that “whereas the bee builds with wax that he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate conceptual material which he first has to manufacture from himself” (1979, p. 85). What can be inferred from these passages is that, for Nietzsche, doing philosophy, insofar as it involves language is, by definition, also a process of engaging in manufacturing our own conceptual material (i.e., language). In addition, we could say that, for Nietzsche, manufacturing conceptual material, based on the experience of the conventionality of language (i.e., in-fancy), is the task of the philosopher, per se, including Nietzsche’s own philosophizing and his articulation of the idea of the conventionality of language.

In the following quote he may come closest to expressing the experience of the contingency of language in a way that reflects the idea of in-fancy as the source of radically new ways of speaking (and, thus, thinking and acting):

[I]t seems to me that “the correct perception”—which would mean the adequate expression of an object in the subject—is a contradictory impossibility. For between two absolutely different spheres, such as subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression;

there is, at most, an aesthetic behavior or relationship [*Verhalten*], meaning, a suggestive transference, a stammering, mimicking [*nachstammelnde*] translation into a completely foreign tongue—for which there is required, in any case, a freely composing and freely inventing intermediate sphere and mediating force.⁴³ (Nietzsche, 1952, p. 1087)

This passage could be said to contain both, the idea of the indistinguishability of language and not language, by speaking of an intermediate sphere between subject (language) and object (not-language, the ineffable), and that of the contingency of language, insofar as he describes this sphere as one that is “freely composing,” and “freely inventing” (the sphere itself, not the subject). So here we have something very similar to the idea of a state of in-fancy on the margin of language and not language as the source of radically new ways of speaking and, thus, a precondition (if not the task itself) of philosophy.

The role of time in Nietzsche’s philosophy and its similarity to the kind of temporarily that forms a facet of the experience of in-fancy, is well expressed in the following quote, from „The Case of Wagner“ (Nietzsche, 1967). Here, Nietzsche writes:

⁴³ My translation. The German original reads: “Überhaupt aber scheint mir ‘die richtige Perzeption’ – das würde heißen: der adäquate Ausdruck eines Objekts im Subjekt – ein widerspruchsvolles Unding: denn zwischen zwei absolut verschiedenen Sphären, wie zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, gibt es keine Kausalität, keine Richtigkeit, keinen Ausdruck, sondern höchstens ein *ästhetisches* Verhalten, ich meine eine andeutende Übertragung, eine nachstammelnde Übersetzung in eine ganz fremde Sprache: wozu es aber jedenfalls einer frei dichtenden und frei erfindenden Mittelsphäre und Mittelkraft bedarf” (Friedrich Nietzsche. „Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne“ (1873). *Nietzsches Werke in zwei Bänden*, Bd. II, 1952, p. 1087.

What does a philosopher demand of himself first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become “timeless.” With what must he therefore engage in the hardest combat? With whatever marks him as the child of his time. Well then! I am, no less than Wagner, a child of this time; that is, a decadent: but I comprehend this, I resisted it. The philosopher in me resisted. (1967, pp. 154-155)

The key phrase here is “to overcome his time in himself, to become ‘timeless’” [*seine Zeit in sich zu überwinden, ‘zeitlos’ zu werden*], which seems a different way of saying that the task of the philosopher is to acknowledge the conventionality of language and to dwell in the “freely composing and freely invention intermediate sphere and mediating force,” in order to resist, and go beyond established (that is, conventional) ways of using language.

The term Nietzsche uses to express the particular nature of the experience of dwelling in such a state is “the unhistorical” (see “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in: *Untimely Meditations*, 1997). For Nietzsche, the “vaporous region of the unhistorical” (ibid., p. 64), is neither a-historical (animals), nor historical or suprahistorical (humans), but, as Agamben would say, a zone of indistinction, or indistinguishability, between the historical and the a-historical, the human, and the non-human. The following passage may illustrate this point:

[W]e shall thus have to account the capacity to feel to a certain degree unhistorical as being more vital and more fundamental, inasmuch as it constitutes the foundation upon which alone anything sound, healthy and

great, anything truly human, can grow. The unhistorical is like an atmosphere within which alone life can germinate and with the destruction of which it must vanish. ... without that envelope of the unhistorical he [man] would never have begun or dared to begin. ... this condition—unhistorical, anti-historical through and through—is the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too; and no painter will paint his picture, no general achieve his victory, no people attain its freedom without having first desired and striven for it in an unhistorical condition such as that described. (ibid., p. 63-64).

Here, Nietzsche seems to express something very similar to Agamben's idea of in-fancy and the kind of temporality that accompanies it (*kairos*, Messianic time), given that he refers to both a moment of radical openness and to infinite possibilities that anticipate eternity in the now as a prerequisite for anything great, due to the fact that it allows us to deviate from established ways of speaking, thinking, and acting. Insofar as the possibility of the unhistorical is intimately tied to the experience of the contingency of language, and, given that, for him, philosophy is about realizing new ways of speaking, the experience of the unhistorical, like the experience of in-fancy for Agamben, may be seen as a defining feature of Nietzsche's idea of doing philosophy.

Finally, we find in Nietzsche an idea of communality that corresponds to Agamben's idea of philosophy as a communal experience of in-fancy. Based on the previous section, we can articulate this idea as a communal experience of the unhistorical. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, Nietzsche writes that “[u]nder the

spell of the Dionysian the bond between man and man locks itself into place” In such a state, he continues,

each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbor, but as one with him. ... In song and in dance man exhibits himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak, and is on the point of taking a dancing flight into the air. His gestures bespeak enchantment. Even as the animals now talk, and as the earth yields milk and honey, so also something super natural sounds forth from him: he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted and elated even as the gods whom he saw walking about in his dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all nature here reveals itself in the tremors of drunkenness to the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity. (1967, p. 27)

So here the other facets: the contingency of language and indistinguishability of subject/language and object/not-language in a “freely composing and freely inventing intermediate sphere and mediating force” and the temporality of the unhistorical lead to the possibility of a community that allows for “the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity.” While different from the Socratic Community, it is not difficult to see how Nietzsche—had he thought of philosophy as more of a communal activity—might have seen the communal aspect of the practice as the key to the realization of the kind of communal experience he prized so highly.

Summarizing this chapter so far, we can say that in both, Socratic philosophy and in Nietzsche's work, we can detect the idea of in-fancy as a defining and constitutive feature of the practice of philosophy. In both cases, the practice derives its value from the fact that it allows for a certain kind of experience that is made possible by dwelling in a sphere that allows for more openness in the use of language, and in both cases there is an element of communality, only that Nietzsche does not explicitly acknowledge the role of philosophy in bringing about a particular kind of community.

3.5.3. Dewey's notion of the experience of an empirical unity of opposites. In contrast to a Socratic and Nietzschean view, language plays less of a central role in Dewey's conception of the practice of philosophy. Nevertheless, his work also contains the idea of a particular kind of experience as the defining feature of doing philosophy, namely the notion of an *experience of an empirical unity of opposites* (hereafter, *Experience*). While not primarily focusing on language, this concept contains several of the facets of in-fancy I distinguished above, namely: indistinguishability, and a similar idea of time and communality. Moreover, not unlike the role of in-fancy for Agamben, Dewey sees the realization of *Experience* as a defining feature of our humanity and considers philosophy as privileged in bringing about this experience.

The clearest expression of this emphatic idea of experience, and the one that comes closest to the idea of in-fancy, can be found in *Experience and Nature* (2008). While Dewey doesn't think of *Experience* in linguistic terms (as a state of indistinguishability of the opposites of language and not-language), and, instead, uses a

largely naturalistic vocabulary, his idea of *Experience* does, otherwise, very much resemble the idea of in-fancy.⁴⁴ In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey writes:

We are here concerned with the fact that it is the intricate mixture of the stable and the precarious, the fixed and the unpredictably novel, the assured and the uncertain, in existence which sets mankind upon that love of wisdom which forms philosophy. Yet too commonly ... the result of the search is converted into a metaphysics which denies or conceals from acknowledgement the very characters of existence which initiated it, and which give significance to its conclusions. (2008, p. 59)

Here Dewey describes philosophy as being motivated by the unity of opposites as it is encountered in (everyday) existence (“experience as finite and temporal, as full of error, conflict and contradiction”), and of experiencing a state where these opposites are not resolved and where “the result of the search is [not] converted into a metaphysics which denies or conceals from acknowledgement the very characters of existence which initiated it, and which give significance to its conclusions.” In other words, the experience of the unity of opposites can be seen as the source and the defining feature of engaging in “that love of wisdom which forms philosophy,” and, dwelling in such a state where this unity is being experienced could, thus, be considered a state that is unique to the practice of philosophy, and one that allows for a fuller realization of our humanity.

This can be inferred from the following passage, also in *Nature and Experience*:

⁴⁴ This is especially apparent in James W. Garrison’s interpretation of Dewey’s work, and the concept of experience, in particular, especially in: “Dewey and the Empirical Unity of Opposites,” 1985.

[A] mind that has opened itself to experience [i.e., *Experience*] and that has ripened through its discipline knows its own littleness and impotencies; it knows that its wishes and acknowledgements are not final measures of the universe whether in knowledge or in conduct, and hence are, in the end, transient. But it also knows that its juvenile assumption of power and achievement is not a dream to be wholly forgotten. It implies a unity with the universe that is to be preserved. (2008, p. 420)

As such, it is, for Dewey, also the source of an experience that is pleasurable in itself. So when he writes that “[t]he union of the hazardous and the stable, of the incomplete and the recurrent, is the condition of all experienced satisfaction as truly as of our predicaments and problems” (ibid., p. 62).⁴⁵

Insofar as, for Dewey, such a state is also most suitable for citizens in a truly democratic society, it can further be said that philosophy (as what allows for the realization of such an experience) could be seen as a defining feature of such a society. Dewey does indeed express this idea, most clearly in “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” (1988), echoing here both Agamben’s idea of in-fancy itself, and the kind of communality associated with the experience of in-fancy. Dewey writes:

Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of

⁴⁵ While Dewey does not speak about experience (primarily) in terms of language but as staying open to new experiences, I believe that it is possible to re-interpret his idea of the experience of the unity of opposites in linguistic terms by thinking of the unity of language and not-language as the primary pair of opposites, and of the openness to new experiences as that of staying open to the possibility for new articulations. And what Dewey calls the experience of “a mind that has opened itself to experience” could be read as a mind that has opened itself to being in a state of in-fancy.

ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process. ... All ends and values that are cut off from the ongoing process become arrests, fixations. They strive to fixate what has been gained instead of using it to open the road and point the way to new and better experiences. (1988, p. 229)

So, basically analogous to the way Agamben conceives of in-fancy, Dewey sees *Experience* as both a defining feature of the practice of philosophy and as both the hallmark of a truly democratic society and what allows for the realization of such a more humane society.⁴⁶

3.5.4. Phenomena and articulation in phenomenological conceptions of philosophy. While phenomenology is by no means a unitary project, with proponents as diverse as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer, I intend to show that one of the central, and defining (and unifying) features of a phenomenological understanding of the practice of philosophy is a state of fluctuating between the phenomena as they appear to us, and their articulation. This idea, I believe, is very similar to at least some of the facets of the experience of in-fancy. I will begin with a description of Husserl's view of this central feature of phenomenology, to then show how it is also

⁴⁶ Again, while Dewey does not focus on language, this is indeed the case with Rorty (and other Neo-Pragmatists). We could say that Rorty replaces Dewey's experience of the empirical unity of opposites with the experience of the contingency of language—which, in turn, is the key to the contingency of self, and society (Rorty, 1989). But while Rorty shifts the emphasis to language, the problem is that, for him, it becomes all about language. By making the experience all about language, however, he also loses the idea (that is at least also present in Dewey) of the unity of the opposites of language and not-language that is central to Agamben's notion of in-fancy (for more about Rorty, see chapter 6). (Agamben could be seen here as bridging, and potentially reconciling Dewey and Rorty.)

found in the work of Heidegger, and van Manen—the latter coming closest to expressing the idea of in-fancy as central to the practice of philosophy.

The original philosophical project of Phenomenology as envisioned by Husserl is directed at determining the condition for the possibility of scientific knowledge. But rather than assuming that such knowledge concerns an external, mind-independent reality, phenomenology focuses on the way things appear to us. Referring to Husserl's maxim "To the things themselves," Heidegger gives the following rather concise definition of phenomenology: "Phenomenology' means ... to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger, 2008, H 34). The point here is that what Husserl calls the "things themselves" are the things as they appear to us, and not, as one might think, the things as they presumably exist in a mind-independent reality. What is assumed here as a basic fact, is that we experience things in a certain way (without making any assumptions about the ontological status of what we experience). For Husserl, the defining feature of (conscious) experience is intentionality, which simply means that all thinking—all "'imagining, perceiving, remembering, etc.'" is always thinking about something" (van Manen, 1990, p. 182). This is true whether the object we imagine, perceive, or remember exists or is simply imaginary. "The object of the intentional relationship can be specific (pencil) or general (justice), real (bread) or fictive (the Centaur), amorphous (the sky) or defined (triangle)" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). In other words, the intentional object *is* the object that is being intended rather than being a "mediator for our access to the real, mind-transcendent object" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 21).

While Husserl, in his early work, is primarily interested in developing criteria to determine the validity of knowledge claims about phenomena, what is important for the context of this investigation is the role of language and its relationship to the phenomena. Here, the key is that, for Husserl, there is always more to how an intended object (be it physical, or an abstract concept) appears to us. This leaves us to strive for the most complete description of the intended object, culminating in “optimal givenness,” i.e. “the kind of givenness that offers us the object with as much information and in as differentiated a manner as possible” (Zahavi, 2003, p. 35). Language plays a crucial and active role here, in that it is used to articulate the phenomena and the way they appear to us in a more complete or adequate way by oscillating between the phenomena and the language we use to describe them (this is especially true for abstract phenomena, like freedom, or justice, but also applies to our perception of physical objects). But in spite of the central role that language plays in this process, Husserl sees the roll of language as that of *translating* language-independent experience into language.

Agamben discusses this aspect of Husserl’s idea of experience in detail (2007), and shows how there is, in spite of the apparent lack of emphasis on language, an (implicit) acknowledgment of the role of language. The following passage shows both how close Husserl comes to articulating the idea of in-fancy, and how he tries to hold on to the idea of a purely pre-linguistic, ineffable realm as the basis for experience. The passage Agamben refers to, reads:

[W]hen descriptive theory of consciousness begins radically, it has before it no ... data and wholes, except perhaps as prejudices. Its beginning is the

pure—and, so to speak, still dumb [*stumm*—psychological experience, which now must be made to utter its own sense with no adulteration. The truly first utterance, however, is the Cartesian utterance of the *ego cogito*. (Husserl, 1960, *Cartesian Meditations*, cited in Agamben, 2007, p. 42)

As Agamben points out, Husserl's phrasing contradicts/undermines the point he is making, namely that what he calls "dumb (*stumm*, i.e., mute, silent) psychological experience, exists already in some (negative) relation to language. Agamben writes:

With this concept of *mute* experience ... Husserl had got closer to the idea of pure experience—that is, something anterior both to subjectivity and to an alleged psychological reality. It is strange that he then should have identified it with its 'expression' in the *ego cogito*, thus from *mute* to *voiced*. Perhaps the fact that in this passage the transcendental subject is grasped at once as an expression, hence as something linguistic, is not accidental; ... A theory of experience truly intended to posit the problem of origin in a radical way would then have to start beyond this 'first expression' with experience as 'still mute so to speak'—that is, it would have to ask: does a mute experience exist, does an *infancy* of experience exist? And, if it does, what is its relationship to language? (ibid.)

What Agamben is suggesting here, is that Husserl himself implicitly acknowledges the experience of in-fancy. It may be seen as a shortcoming of Husserl work as a phenomenologist, who is meant to be open to both the phenomena *and* their articulation that he fails to perceive the role of language in the way the phenomena appear to us.

Like Husserl, Heidegger's understanding of the practice philosophy can also be seen as containing the idea of the experience of in-fancy. While it may seem that, compared to Husserl, Heidegger's emphasis on the question of being (ontology), moves further in the direction of the ineffable (that is, away from language), Heidegger's understanding of at least the *practice* of philosophy, I believe, is very similar to that of Husserl, in that he also conceives of it as dwelling in a state of openness with regard to both the phenomena and their (linguistic) articulation.⁴⁷ To show in what sense this is indeed the case, I will take a closer look at the role of language in the constitution of Dasein. To summarize the following in the most general terms, we could say that, for Heidegger, growing into and adopting established ways of speaking leads us to exist primarily in an inauthentic mode. To become more authentic, we need to loosen the grip of language (established ways of speaking) by dwelling in a state where all the constituting aspects of Dasein (linguistic, and non-linguistic) can be experienced equiprimordially. This state, I argue, corresponds to the experience of in-fancy, insofar as it is a state of indistinguishability of language and not-language. And, not unlike the role of in-infancy for Agamben, what makes the realization of this state so significant, for

⁴⁷ Heidegger himself emphasizes his indebtedness to phenomenology as conceived by Husserl, when he points out that the importance of phenomenology does not lie in its "actuality as a philosophical 'movement' ['Richtung']," but as a possibility, stating, in this context, that: "Higher than actuality stands possibility" (2008, H 38). And: "Ontology and phenomenology are not two distinct philosophical disciplines among others. These terms characterize philosophy itself with regard to its object and its way of treating that object. Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of existence, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it arises and to which it returns" (ibid., H 38). And, finally: "Phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible" (ibid., H 35).

Heidegger, is that the increased openness to the phenomena (being) and their articulation (language) allows for a more authentic way of being in the world.⁴⁸

For Heidegger, language plays a crucial role for Dasein's being in the world. This is because it is language that first allows us to engage in the articulation of phenomena (including that of Dasein itself), that is, to thematize being (our own, and being, in general).⁴⁹ However, for Heidegger, we don't start with a blank slate, and we can only interpret or make explicit what is already there (*da*). This is because, as Dasein (literally "Being There"), we *are* there (*Da-sein*), that is, we exist (without having chosen to exist), and we are *there* (*Da-sein*), that is, we find ourselves in a particular place and time, engaged with particular things and people. So, rather than discovering the world as something that is set in front of us, the world (i.e., *our* world) is disclosing itself to us.

Language, or *discourse* (*Rede*), for Heidegger, is only one of three equiprimordial (equally constitutive) ways of Dasein's being in the world, the other two being *state-of-mind* (*Befindlichkeit*) and *understanding* (*Verstehen*). Whereas discourse is the aspect of our experience (i.e., the way the world is disclosed to us) that concerns the linguistically-mediated interactions with other Dasein (and the world, more generally), state-of-mind refers to the aspect of our experience (being there) that is pre-conceptual. It describes the general mood we are in, in a given context. Understanding, finally, refers to the—also

⁴⁸ In fact, Heidegger's project in *Being and Time*, of articulating the phenomenon of Dasein, can itself be seen as a demonstration of how doing philosophy consists in coming up with new articulations of phenomena by being equally open to the phenomena and their articulation, and how engaging in this particular practice of doing philosophy, could be seen as a demonstration of an authentic way of being in the world.

⁴⁹ Agamben: "The opening of the *ontological* dimension (being, the world) corresponds to the pure taking place of language as an originary event, while the *ontic* dimension (entities, things) corresponds to that which, in this opening, is said and signified" (*Language and Death*, 1991 p. 26).

pre-conceptual and non-reflective—nature of our involvement with the things and people in our world. For Heidegger, these constitutive ways of Dasein's being-in-the-world are not separate, but are merely different facets of the way in which we exist in (and experience) our world that are inextricably linked and can only be separated analytically.

Discourse plays a special role in the way we relate to our own Da-sein (being-there). This is because having grown up with and into a language, we are introduced into a language (a way of speaking about things) that is not our own. For Heidegger, this is problematic, because it is through discourse that we, as Dasein, articulate (express) ourselves. Heidegger writes: "Because discourse is constitutive for the Being of the 'there' (that is, for states-of-mind and understanding) ... Dasein as discursive Being-in, has already expressed itself. Dasein has language" (ibid., H 165). For Heidegger, the way Dasein has already expressed itself is through the everyday form of discourse, or, what Heidegger calls "idle talk" (*Gerede*).⁵⁰ As Heidegger makes clear, "idle talk" is used in a neutral (rather than pejorative) sense and should be seen as "a positive phenomenon which constitutes the kind of Being of everyday Dasein's understanding and interpreting" (ibid., H 167). And since it is "idle talk" that has shaped the other two ways in which our world is disclosed to us, we are—first and foremost—not our own, proper selves. Rather, for Heidegger, we are public selves, or "oneselves," i.e., part of what he calls "*das Man*"

⁵⁰ It may be worth pointing out here that "*Gerede*," while usually used in a derogative sense of "just talk," or "gossip," is derived from the past participle of "*reden*" (to talk), so that "*Gerede*" (idle talk), literally, simply means that which has (already) been said or talked about.

(“the they,” or “the one”). “The ‘they,’” he writes, “prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees’” (ibid., H 170).⁵¹

According to Heidegger, the way the they prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines how one “sees” is by leading us to get separated from things and other Dasein, because Dasein “has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner” (ibid., H 168). In other words, discourse (*Rede*) in its default mode of idle talk (*Gerede*) is the reason why Dasein finds itself first and foremost in a state of inauthenticity.⁵² The question is whether, and if so, how, Dasein can become authentic, or at least less inauthentic. For Heidegger, this is indeed a possibility, and can be accomplished in the following way:

If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [*eigens*] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (ibid., H 129)

⁵¹ The following passage shows very clearly how Heidegger thinks of “idle talk” as constitutive(?) of both state of mind and understanding: “This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a ‘world-in-itself’ so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the public way in which possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world ‘matter’ to it. The ‘they’ prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees’.” (p. 213)

⁵² “Proximally,” Heidegger writes, “it is not ‘I’, in the sense of my own Self, that ‘am’, but rather the Others, whose way is that of the ‘they’. In terms of the ‘they’, and as the “they”, I am ‘given’ proximally to ‘myself’ [mir ‘selbst’]. Proximally Dasein is ‘they’, and for the most part it remains so” (Ibid., H 129).

But how can this discovery, this clearing-away of concealments, etc., be accomplished? Given that language as a form to communicate with others and its default mode of “idle talk” is the root of inauthenticity, it seems that it would have to come from the relationship between language and those facets of Dasein that are not linguistic, or other more than merely linguistic (things, bodies) that are disclosed to Dasein through state-of-mind (mood) and understanding, which are, by themselves, neither authentic nor inauthentic.

Coming here extremely close to Agamben’s idea of in-fancy as the im-potentiality of language (ability to speak, but not speaking), Heidegger proposes that one way to allow for a state in which the other (non-linguistically mediated) aspects of Dasein are more fully realized (or equally realized) is by keeping silent. For Heidegger, keeping silent (not speaking) is a way to relate to and articulate the “intelligibility of Dasein,” and make possible a more genuine discoursing and more authenticity:

Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say—that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself. In that case one’s reticence makes something manifest, and does away with the ‘idle talk.’ As a mode of discoursing, reticence articulates the intelligibility of Dasein in so primordial a manner that it gives rise to a potentiality-for-hearing which is genuine, and to a Being-with-one-another which is transparent. (ibid., H 165)

In other words, keeping silent (not speaking), for Heidegger, points to the possibility of Dasein's "authentic and rich disclosedness of itself," and of reticence being itself a "mode of discoursing," that can "do away" with "idle talk," and bring about genuine discourse, and a Being-with-one-another that is transparent (ibid.).

The term "transparent" is crucial here, because it refers to a type of "sight" (*Sicht*), which, for Heidegger, is one of the key aspects of understanding (*Verstehen*). In contrast to other aspects of understanding, transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*), literally the ability to "see through something," is "related primarily and on the whole to existence" (ibid., H 146). He goes on to state that transparency is "knowledge of the Self" (ibid.). But rather than assuming the self-knowledge of a substantive self, the way he defines transparency is as a state in which all aspects of the experience of our being there (Dasein), including those aspects that are not—or at least not primarily—linguistically mediated, are equally present. He writes:

We choose this term [*transparency*] to designate 'knowledge of the Self' in a sense which is well understood, so as to indicate that here it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the 'Self,' but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-World *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding. In existing, entities [*Existierendes Seiendes*, i.e., Dasein!] sight 'themselves' [*sichtet 'sich'*] only in so far as they have become transparent to themselves with equal primordially in

those items which are constitutive for their existence: their Being-
alongside the world and their Being-with-Others. (ibid.)

In other words, the way entities (“*Existierendes Seiendes*,” i.e., Dasein), can become transparent (i.e., know) themselves, is if they equally consider (give equal weight to) those items which are constitutive for their existence that are not (primarily) linguistic, namely our relationship to things (“being-alongside the world”), and to others (“being-with-Others”). Given that, for Heidegger, what is interpreted has to have already been understood,⁵³ an “authentic and rich disclosure of itself,” then, means an understanding that comes out of an experience of a state in which all aspects of Dasein (linguistic, and non-linguistic), are being experienced together.

The importance of including those aspects of Dasein that are not mediated by language in the process of hermeneutical self-discovery, brings us back to the basic idea of phenomenology as dwelling in a state of openness to both the phenomena and their articulation. For Heidegger, we can never get away from idle-talk. “In it [i.e., idle-talk], out of it, and against it,” he writes, “all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed”(ibid., H 169). However, being in a state that includes both language and the other (non-linguistic/not-only linguistic) aspects of our being in the world, by maintaining a radical openness to the phenomena and possible ways of their articulation, we can loosen the hold the *Man*

⁵³ “The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself [*sich auszubilden*]. This development of the understanding we call ‘interpretation’. In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.” (148)

(i.e., established ways of speaking) has on us, allowing entities to be “appropriated in a primordial manner” (ibid., H 168), which allows us to lead more authentic (or, at least less inauthentic) lives. But given that, for Heidegger, there is no ultimate way of articulating things “as they really are,” this also means that, in the struggle for more adequate ways of articulating phenomena, we experience the limits of language and truth (that there is ultimately no adequate articulation), and, thus, intelligibility, leaving us to “observe entities and marvel[] at them,” and being “amazed to the point of not understanding” (ibid., H 172)—experiencing, as it were, the im-potentiality of language, that is, language in its in-fancy.

While, for Heidegger, a more authentic way of being in the world is potentially possible for all Dasein, it is the practice of philosophy that could be said to have as its defining feature the experience of in-fancy, *qua* im-potentiality of language. We find this idea expressed in de la Durantaye’s observation about Heidegger and potentiality. He writes:

One perfectly coherent way of viewing Heidegger’s philosophical project is in fact as a reconception of *potentiality*. Heidegger defines the subject of his philosophy—*Dasein*—not through its *actuality* but through its *potentiality*, stating at numerous points that ‘*Dasein* is always and essentially its own possibility. (2009, p. 25)

And he continues: “That this idea is not limited to the specific aims of *Being and Time* is witnessed elsewhere, such as in Heidegger’s description of an ‘essential attentiveness to the possible’ as characterizing both ‘original philosophy’ and ‘great poetry’” (ibid.).

While in Socratic philosophy, and in the works of Nietzsche and Dewey, several facets of the experience of in-fancy could be found, the facet that is most prominent in Heidegger's understanding of the practice of philosophy, is that of in-fancy as an ontological state of indistinguishability of language and not-language. While it is not possible here to discuss in detail the presence of the other facets of in-fancy (contingency of language, temporality, and communality) in Heidegger's work, I will conclude this discussion by referring to van Manen's work, as a more recent example of the role of in-fancy in phenomenology. He writes, for example:

Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence—sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications. But, phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning. ... Not unlike the poet, the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations—and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect. (2007, p. 12)

What van Manen expresses here is both an emphasis on the openness to the phenomena *and* an acknowledgement of the process of articulation as the place where not-language (phenomena) and language (articulation) meet, that is, the place that Agamben refers to as the zone of indistinguishability between language and not language. He elaborates on

this idea in a passage on the role of “the reflective methods of writing” (ibid., p. 13) in phenomenological research, stating that:

Lived experience is simply experience-as-we-live-through-it in our actions, relations and situations. Of course, our lived experiences can be highly reflective (such as in making decisions or theorizing) but from a Husserlian phenomenological point of view this reflective experience is still prereflective since we can retroactively (afterwards) subject it to phenomenological reflection. Only through reflection can we appropriate aspects of lived experience but the interpretability of primal impressional life is already in some sense given by its own givenness. (ibid., p. 16)

Speaking of “interpretability of primal impressional life” seems to come very close to what Agamben means when he writes that experience of in-fancy is a part of every speech act in the form of an indistinguishable mix of language and not-language. And, given that, for Agamben, there is always more than just language, in-fancy could be described as the experience of our ability to interpret as such, or, what van Manen calls the “interpretability of primal impressional life.”

3.6. Summary

In this chapter, I showed how Agamben sees the experience of in-fancy (i.e., the im-potentiality of language) as the defining feature of the practice of philosophy. I then distinguished four facets of the experience of in-fancy (indistinguishability, contingency, temporality, and communality) and traced those facets in a number of historical conceptions of the practice of philosophy. I demonstrated how even conceptions that do

not explicitly emphasize the role of language (Dewey, Husserl) can be shown to contain or imply the notion of in-fancy, or, can at least re-interpreted in such a way as to be compatible with it. Rather than claiming that in-fancy is a constitutive feature of the practice of philosophy, in some objective or absolute sense, my intention was to show that the idea of in-fancy is present in prominent conceptions of the practice of philosophy as what accounts for the value of particular nature, and the value of the practice. Having done so, I will, in the next chapter, locate the experience of in-fancy in conceptions of education, arguing that, if the experience of in-fancy can be considered educationally valuable, a practice that allows for that experience (such as the practice of philosophy), should be as well.

Chapter 4: In-fancy in Conceptions of Education

I believe that education ... is a
process of living and not a
preparation for future living.
(Dewey, 1972, p. 87)

4.1. Introduction

One of the conclusions I reached in the last chapter, was that a defining feature of the practice of philosophy is a particular kind of experience (the experience of in-fancy), rather than any particular goals or outcomes (and, in fact, may be said to be about the experience of the very absence of any goals and outcomes). This, however, also means that the practice of philosophy, thus conceived—that is, as being neither about developing, nor teaching, nor acquiring any kind of knowledge, or skills—would appear to be inherently un-educational. The purpose of this chapter is to accomplish the seemingly paradoxical task of arguing that a non-educational practice is educationally valuable. There are only two ways of resolving this apparent paradox: Either, to show that the practice is only *seemingly* non-educational, and that it has something to teach after all, or, that our understanding of education can be expanded in such a way, as to allow for the inclusion of this a non-educational practice as educationally valuable. It is the latter approach, I will pursue in this chapter.

There are, again, two ways of doing this. One could be called an argument from philosophy, the other, an argument from education. The argument from philosophy consists in arguing that the value of philosophy, rather than being about a specific goal or

outcome, is about the broader goal of more fully realizing our human nature. The argument from education, on the other hand, consists in showing how a certain kind of experience (here, the experience of in-fancy) can be shown to be valuable in education (independent of its role in philosophy), making the practice of philosophy valuable, because it can bring about that particular experience. In the following, I will first show what the argument from philosophy looks like (based on some of the positions discussed in the previous chapter, i.e., Socratic Philosophy, Nietzsche, Phenomenology) and why it is ultimately not suitable for the argument I am trying to make. I will then turn to what I have called the argument from education—showing how the idea of in-fancy is an important feature of various philosophies of education, and that it can be developed directly out of the basic premise of progressive education that education should be rooted in experience. This could also be seen as a particularly Agambenian approach to doing philosophy of education, namely of identifying a latent (unactualized) feature in other philosophies, and drawing it out (see also the note on paradigmatology in the Methodology-section).

I begin with a discussion of Dewey's use of the concept of experience, which is especially interesting, because experience (*qua* experience of the unity of opposites) plays a central role both in his philosophy of education, and, as we have seen, in his idea of the practice of philosophy. Rather than arguing from philosophy, he is approaching the issue from the direction of education. This allows him to recognize the problem of proposing experience as itself valuable for education (based on a philosophical notion of human nature). More specifically, what he is struggling with is what could be called the

paradox of the role of experience in education: that education should be about experience as valuable in itself, while also needing to go beyond the given, with regard to both the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and in order to direct students toward the kind of experience he sees as the key to the realization of a better society. I go on to show how Post-Deweyan conceptions of education (Arendt, Illich, Masschelein & Simons, Biesta, Rancière) continue to struggle with exactly this paradox, trying, in ever new constellations and shifts in emphasis to reconcile immanent or pure experience with a need for some kind of transcendence (something new and better), to make the experience educational. Bringing the idea of in-fancy to these conceptions of education will show the different ways in which the educational theorists discussed have tried to reconcile these two (seemingly contradictory) demands: from Dewey's (broadly scientific) notion of experience aimed at new and better experiences, to Arendt's fact of *natality* as allowing for the renewal of the world through new words and deeds, to Illich's emphasis on the *experience* of the new, to Biesta's idea that education needs to allow students to bring something (actually) new into the world, to Masschelein and Simons' emphasis on the experience of the *possibility* of the new, and, finally, Rancière's experience of the equality of intelligences. On the background of these ways of conceiving of experience in education, I then draw from the work of Agamben and Lewis, to show how a weakly-utopian notion of experience in education, enables us to think of the experience of 'possibility as such' as what accounts for the educational value of non-directional practices (such as philosophy with children, and study)—not only in spite of, but *because* of their lack of directionality. Instead of emphasizing the actualization of the new, non-

directional practices allow students to experience the potentiality of the new as such, as a pure means (detached from a specific end, such as the cultivation of certain skills, dispositions, and so forth). What accounts for the educational value of such non-directional practices, as well as their feasibility in a formal education setting, is that they contain an element of transcendence that provides a momentum that keeps things in flux.

4.2. The Educational Value of the Practice of Philosophy (Argument from Philosophy)

Given that the philosophers discussed in the previous chapter could be said to embrace in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy, it is not surprising that their views also support the idea of in-fancy (in some form) as a factor in education. Whether or not we can attribute a philosophy of education to Socrates (separate from that of Plato), it certainly seems possible to infer from Plato's dialogues, that, for Socrates, philosophical discourse should be considered essential for education in that it allows the young to realize that we are ignorant when it comes to ultimate truths. In this sense, the experience of in-fancy, can also be seen as central to his idea of education. However, Socrates' notion of education is quite different from anything resembling what we now think of as formal education. For him, education is an extension of raising children, and, for older youths, a way of being initiated into the public life of the polis. In other words, his is not so much an argument for the inclusion of philosophy in education, as for the inclusion of philosophical practices throughout society as a whole. The problem he faced nevertheless resembles that of proposing that philosophy be done in formal education, because of Socrates' claim that he had nothing to teach, which also mean that he was

encouraging citizens to engage in an activity that was not about accomplishing anything. What made this seemingly harmless activity subversive, we could say, was that it undermined the very idea of instrumentality, that is, the idea that activities we engage in, be it in education, or in the social, and political life of the state, need to have a goal or purpose, however broadly defined (including being pleasurable). What led him to be charged with blasphemy, we could say, is the fact that he questioned this basic assumption. And the scandal, in this case, consists not only, as Kohan has pointed out, in “the idea of a pedagogical situation in which the student learns without a teacher” (Kohan, 2012, 181), but that his particular branch of philosophy questioned not only the idea that education (in a broad sense) needed to be based on established customs and values, but that education could include activities that were not about learning at all.

Nietzsche’s views on education are interesting in this regard, as he also questions a traditional idea of teaching. For him, the teacher is someone who educates by serving as an example, rather than teaching in a traditional sense. In “Schopenhauer as Educator,” for example, he writes: “I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example. ... But this example must be supplied by his outward life and not merely in his books” (2007, p. 136-137). For Nietzsche, the educational value of doing philosophy lies in his understanding of education as a never-to-be-completed process of self-development and self-overcoming (Nietzsche, 2007; see also Marsal, 2011). What drives this process, for Nietzsche, is the courage of going beyond the boundaries that consist in established (conventional) ways of speaking, which is the reason he sees the teaching of our native language, that is, the development of our ability for linguistic articulation, more

generally, as a central concern for schools.⁵⁴ While we see here an emphasis on the need to develop possible ways of articulation (as a pre-condition for self-development), this is not about the experience of in-fancy as such. Insofar as it is about allowing for the experience of in-fancy at all, it is about preparing students to be able to engage in philosophy later on (to become philosophers), in order to realize what Nietzsche considers an essential feature of our humanity, not, however, something that should be realized in education, for its own sake.

Finally, there is a long tradition of phenomenological conceptions of education (e.g., Copei, 1966; Bollnow, 1989, 2013; van Manen, 1991) that could be seen as advocating the experience of in-fancy in education, by emphasizing the importance of moods, and the quality of experiences, for the educational process. Bollnow, for example, writes, that “the entirety of the emotional and mood-related states and the relationships of sympathy and antipathy ... form the background of the educational process” (1989, p. 39). The joyful mood of the child, the love and trust, as well as patience of the educator are, for Bollnow, “fundamental and inevitable preconditions that have to be fulfilled if education is to be successful, and without them any attempt at education is, from the beginning, doomed to failure” (ibid.). And Copei speaks of the “fruitful moment” as something that is being brought about by states of “bewilderment, and the listlessness of

⁵⁴ In *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (2014) he writes: “What would be the duty of a higher educational institution, ... if not this—namely, with authority and dignified severity to put youths, neglected, as far as their own language is concerned, on the right path, and to cry to them: ‘Take your own language seriously! ... [F]rom your treatment of your mother-tongue, we can judge how highly or how lowly you esteem art, and to what extent you are related to it.’” 2014, p. 7).

not-knowing” (1966, p. 21). Van Manen, finally, writes: “The pedagogical atmosphere of the classroom seems composed of modulating waves of attention and distraction, washing over the complex life and dynamics of interiorities and exteriorities within which teaching and learning occur” (2012, p. 15). While there is an appreciation of certain kinds of experiences as valuable in themselves, the phenomenological tradition has generally emphasized the role of such experiences in enhancing and furthering the pedagogical process—be it for teachers to teach more effectively (pedagogical tact), or for students to learn better (pedagogical atmosphere), rather than seeing such experiences as valuable in themselves. And while these positions may imply some aspect of the experience of infancy (because of the general idea, underlying phenomenology, of an openness to both the phenomena and their articulation), the emphasis is less on the role of language (articulation), and more on the non-linguistic (pre-reflective) aspects of the experience. Insofar as language plays a role at all, it is with regard to the articulation of the pre-reflective and pre-conceptual aspects of educational practice and their relevance for education.

In summary, we can say that the argument from philosophy is about the inclusion of philosophy in education for the realization of what is seen as a particular feature of human nature. For Socrates, it is about engaging in a dialogue that makes us realize the limits of what we can know, for Nietzsche, it is about the realization of the conventionality of language as the key for our self-development, and for phenomenologists, it is about appreciating the non-linguistic dimension of what is happening in educational settings. A Socratic model may come closest to—at least

implicitly—advocating for in-fancy (an experience that is made possible by the practice of philosophy) as something that is also important for education, whereas from a Nietzschean and a Phenomenological perspective, the focus is either on education as a *preparation* for the realization of an essential aspect of our human nature (Nietzsche), or it is an application of certain basic philosophical considerations to education. None of them argue specifically that the practice of philosophy should be included in education, and if they did, they would run into the problem of having to show why an activity that is—in their own understanding—not about realizing any specific goals or outcomes (with the possible exception of certain variants of phenomenology) should be included in an educational settings.

Of the philosophers discussed in the previous chapter, Dewey's views on education are different in this regard, due to the fact that he approaches the issue from the perspective of an educator. It is for this reason that I will begin my presentation of what I have called the argument from education, in the next section, with Dewey's discussion of the role of experience in education.

4.3. The Role of Experience in Education (Dewey)

In contrast to the positions discussed in the previous section, Dewey's reflections on the role of experience in education, are equally influenced by his philosophical, and his educational views. As we have seen in the last chapter, experience plays a central role in Dewey's conception of the practice of philosophy. Of the philosophers discussed above, Dewey's emphatic sense of experience (as *Experience*) may come closest to the experience of in-fancy, insofar as he describes *Experience* as a combination of opposing

elements that are inextricably linked, and, thus, indistinguishable, so, when he speaks of an “intricate mixture of the stable and the precarious, the fixed and the unpredictably novel, the assured and the uncertain” (1981, p. 55). As mentioned before, in spite of the fact that he does not focus primarily on language (due to his commitments to naturalism), it is possible to re-articulate his concept of experience in linguistic terms, to show its relationship to (and compatibility with) the experience of in-fancy. This can be done by interpreting “the stable,” “the fixed,” or “the assured” to mean established ways of speaking (and language, more generally), and “the precarious,” “the unpredictably novel,” and “the uncertain,” as those aspects in our use of language that exceed language—meaning those aspects of experience that, as Agamben puts it, prevent language to be merely “a ‘game’ in Wittgenstein’s sense” (2007, p. 58). As we have seen in the previous chapter, experience, in this emphatic sense (i.e., *qua Experience*), is, for Dewey, both a defining feature of the practice of philosophy and what allows for a realization of a constitutive aspect of human nature.

Experience, for Dewey, is also a central—if not the most important—term in his conception of education. While experience had played a more or less important role in pre-Deweyan conceptions of education (e.g., Rousseau), what distinguishes Dewey is that he fully realizes what could be called the paradox of the role of experience in education: that experience in education is thought to be valuable for its own sake (for its quality, independent of outcomes), while, on the other hand, needing to be directed at outcomes to be considered educational (or educationally valuable) at all. We find a version of this paradox already in Kant, who calls it “one of the greatest problems of education” (1900,

p. 27). He writes: “How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint?”, in other words, how can the student experience freedom, if the process of allowing for that experience requires restraint, which seems to undermine the student’s ability to experience freedom. Kant can resolve this problem, because he assumes that there is a right way to use one’s freedom.⁵⁵ And we find it again in Rousseau, who ostensibly emphasizes freedom over restraint, only to introduce nature, and the not so subtle guidance of the teacher (in setting up the circumstances that lead the student to learn), to avoid the paradox.⁵⁶ In spite of a difference in vocabulary, for both Kant and Rousseau, experience (here, the experience of freedom) is tied to, and serves to realize, a certain outcome that consists in a pre-determined model of rationality. In other words, freedom here is the freedom to use one’s mind according to the rules of reason.⁵⁷ The difference of Dewey’s view of the role of experience in education is that, without the assumption of a right way of using one’s reason, or some general standard of the right way to live, more generally, that is, without a clear idea of what it is we want to develop in students (except for an openness to new and better experiences), the paradox takes on the following form: How can the students be allowed to engage in activities that are considered valuable only

⁵⁵ The full quote reads: “One of the greatest problems of education is how to unite submission to the necessary *restraint* with the child’s capability of exercising his *freewill*—for restraint is necessary. How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint? I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of his freedom, and at the same time I am to guide him to use his freedom aright. Without this all education is merely mechanical, and the child, when his education is over, will never be able to make a proper use of his freedom” (Kant on Education [*Über Pädagogik*], translated by Annette Churton, 1900, p. 27).

⁵⁶ As Lewis has pointed out, there is a Machiavellian element to the actions of Rousseau’s tutor, so, when Rousseau writes about the student Emile to ‘let him always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive’ (quoted in: Lewis, 2013, p. 19).

⁵⁷ It may be mentioned that Rousseau allows for what could be called a pure state of experience, but only for children, under the age of twelve, who haven’t yet developed the ability to think rationally (Rousseau, 1979, p. 93 ff.).

for the experience they make possible, if education, by definition, needs to be directed at something beyond the given. Put differently: How can we think of experience in such a way that makes it both valuable in itself, and contains enough momentum toward something new, something that transcends the given.

As we have seen in the last chapter, at the level of society, in general, Dewey sees *Experience* as the key to the ability to move beyond the status quo toward the realization of a better society. While at the level of society there may also be a tension between the immanent nature of the experience and the idea of directionality toward a better society, when it comes to education, the paradox is more pronounced. This is because the idea of experience as valuable in itself rather than being directed at a particular outcome seems to directly contradict the idea that, by definition, education needs to bring about a desirable change in the student (be it in the form of specific knowledge, or skills, or, more generally, to prepare students to become the kind of citizen that will help realize a more democratic society). For Dewey, giving up directionality in education is tantamount to giving up the idea of human progress. But given that, for Dewey, *Experience* (that is, non-directional experience) is a requirement for the realization of a better (more democratic) society, he is faced with the problem of how to actively develop in students the ability for a kind of non-directional experience, that is, an experience that is about not being directed toward specific goals or outcomes. In other words, the question is, how students can be prepared to realize a society in which (non-teleological) experience (as valuable in itself) is possible, without actively moving them toward the realization of such a better, more truly democratic society, in the future.

What makes Dewey's discussion of experience and education so interesting is that he clearly sees this problem, but tries to reconcile the two sides of the paradox, rather than settling for an easy solution. It is this struggle and what remains unsaid (the remnants of that struggle) that makes his work so interesting in the context of this investigation, constituting, as it were, what Agamben refers to as the properly philosophical element in any work: that which goes unsaid therein and thereby possess a possibility for development (de la Durantaye, 2009). Quoting Agamben, de la Durantaye writes: 'the properly philosophical element in any work, be it a work of scholarship, of literature, or of art, is that which goes unsaid therein, and thereby possesses a possibility for development'" (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 9). Commenting on this passage, de la Durantaye writes: "For Agamben, the philosophical element—rich in potentiality—is that which, while present, goes unstated in a work and is thereby left for others to read between the lines and formulate in [sic] their own" (ibid.). I believe it is the idea of infancy that can be said to be present, while also remaining unsaid, in Dewey's discussion of experience in education.

The work in which the struggle mentioned earlier may be most evident, is *Experience and Education* (1997). While, for Dewey, the problem of traditional education was that it neglected experience, he believes that relying solely on experience (in what he sees as the excesses of progressive education) is equally problematic. For experience to be educative, according to Dewey, it is not sufficient that it be "immediately enjoyable," "agreeable," or "exciting" (1997, p. 26). Rather, for him, experience (in the present) needs to be of the kind that allows experiences (past, present,

and future) to be “linked cumulatively to one another” in order to assure a “continuity of experience” that makes “richer” experiences, in the future, possible (ibid.). In order to create such continuity, the learner needs to engage in “an active quest for information and for production of new ideas” that “become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented” (ibid., p. 79). So, analogous to the process of scientific inquiry, Dewey sees the educational process as directed toward the new (here: new information, new ideas). However, it is not the actual attainment of the new that makes this process valuable, but the way in which the experience of the process “promotes,” to use Dewey’s term, “new and better experiences” in the future (1988, p. 229). Dewey expresses this idea of the importance of the (experience of) the pursuit over the attainment of the new most clearly when he talks about the role of experience in a democratic society. “Democracy,” he writes, “is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process” so that it may “open the road and point the way to new and better experiences” (ibid.).

One way of reading this, when applied to education, is to say that education should allow for the kind of desirable experience that accompanies the pursuit of the new, in the present, in order to prepare students for equally desirable experience, in the future. But it is clear that, for Dewey, experience (at least in education), is not just about directionality toward new and *equally desirable* experience in the future, but toward *improved* experience, attained in the process of the pursuit of the new. He writes, for example: “No experience is educative that does not tend both to knowledge of more facts

and entertaining of more ideas and to a better, a more orderly, arrangement of them” (1997, p. 82). Here Dewey makes it clear that it is some kind of substantive progress, or growth, achieved along the way, that accounts for such improved experience, both at the individual level (an ever improved way of organizing our experience according to scientific method) and at the communal level (a constantly improving society based on scientific principles).⁵⁸ In other words, what ultimately accounts for the value of experience in education, for Dewey, is not just a general openness toward new experiences in the future, but that it familiarizes students with the nature and the process of scientific inquiry aimed at substantive progress.

That experience can or should be understood (only) in terms of progress based on scientific principles, however, is not implied/contained in the idea of experience itself, or *educative* experience, for that matter.⁵⁹ Rather, it is derived from the unsubstantiated assumption that experience, to be considered valuable at all, needs to be directed at something new and better, and that what makes experience better is the application of scientific method—an idea that is then applied to experience in education. This also means that, even if we believe that there has to be some directionality in experience in order to be educative (i.e., that it needs to be more than simply agreeable, exciting, etc.),

⁵⁸ He writes, for example, that “scientific method provides a working pattern of the way in which and the conditions under which experiences are used to lead ever onward and outward” (ibid., p. 88). And: “The methods of science also point the way to the measures and policies by means of which a better social order can be brought into existence” (ibid., p. 81).

⁵⁹ While Dewey might be right when he writes that “It is not true that organization is a principle foreign to experience”, adding: “Otherwise experience would be so dispersive as to be chaotic” (1997, p. 82), it doesn’t follow that the idea of experience implies a principle of a movement toward an increasingly better and more orderly arrangement of ideas, whether such movement is conceived in scientific terms, or otherwise.

it does not follow that we have to think of such directionality in *scientific* terms. And, once we accept that experience (both, in general, and in education), is not limited to the new understood in scientific terms, we may wonder if we need not assume a more basic dimension of experience of the new (as such) as what is presupposed by the experience of any particular/qualified kind of new (whether conceived in scientific terms, or otherwise).

Dewey himself hints at this idea of a more basic dimension of experience (albeit as what needs to be excluded/overcome) in his discussion of the difference between educative and non-, or mis-educative experience. In addition to genuinely educative experience, and non-, or mis-educative experience that “arrest[s] or distort[s] the growth of further experience” (ibid., p. 25), there seems to be a third type of experience that lacks the kind of scientifically organized directionality that allows us to “control future experiences” (ibid., p. 26), without therefore being simply the opposite of educative experience. He writes:

Each experience may be lively, vivid, and ‘interesting,’ and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated centrifugal habits. The consequence of formation of such habits is inability to control future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control. (ibid., p. 26)

So, for Dewey, the problem with this kind of experience is not that it is not open to new experience (if anything, it could be said to be too open to new experience), but that it does not engage in the kind of orderly (i.e., scientific) pursuit of the new, which he sees

as a requirement for the ability to “control future experiences,” and for “self-control.”

And yet, it seems to be exactly this kind of experience that is not already (scientifically) organized (i.e., made continuous) and instead consists in the experience of the unqualified (i.e., un-controlled, not-predetermined) new that could be said to be presupposed by any truly open-ended pursuit of the new (scientific, or otherwise).

4.4. *Natality* as the Basis of Education to Renew the World (Arendt)

In the previous section, we have seen how the idea of in-fancy allowed me to point to a struggle, in Dewey’s educational philosophy, between wanting to allow for pure experience and a perceived need for directionality toward new and better experiences in the future. Like Dewey, Arendt also emphasizes the new, but rather than focusing on the actualization of the new in the future, she looks at *natality* as the origin of the possibility of the new. What she means by natality, is the fact that there are always new people being born into the world, and given that each of these individuals is unique, this is what allows for (the possibility of) a continuous renewal of the world. In contrast to Heidegger, who sees the acceptance of death (at the other end of human existence) as the source of a more authentic (i.e., a more free, less conditioned) existence, for Arendt, it is the fact of birth that constitutes the source of our freedom, and, thus, the basis for a better (or at least less bad) world.⁶⁰ Another difference to Heidegger is her emphasis on the significance of natality *for the world*. Her view is more Deweyan than Heideggerian, in this regard, because the realization of natality is not primarily about the experience of

⁶⁰ For a discussion of Arendt’s notion of natality in relation to Heidegger, see Vatter, Miguel, “Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt.” *Revista de Ciencia Política*, Volumen 26, N° 2, 2006, pp. 137 – 159.

freedom of the individual, but rather about the individual's role in relation to others (and the world, more generally), in the same way as, for Dewey, *Experience* could be said to be crucially significant for the continuous renewal of a democratic society. While such a society may also provide better experiences for individuals, Arendt's emphasis is on the significance of natality (and of the need for individuals to embrace natality) for the sake of the world.

Given that, for Arendt, the "fact of natality" represents possibility of new beginnings, in general, it is not surprising that it also plays a central role in her educational thought. "[T]he essence of education," she writes, "is natality, the fact that human beings are born into the world" (2006, p. 174). For her, education is crucial, in this regard, because the attitude toward the fact of natality of the new generation is determined by the older generation's attitude toward the fact of natality. She writes:

What concerns us all and cannot therefore be turned over to the special science of pedagogy is the relation between grown-ups and children in general or, putting it in even more general and exact terms, our attitude toward the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth.

(Arendt, 2006, p. 196)

The reason education is so important for her, is that it has the task of ensuring the renewal of the world, in order to "save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable" (ibid.). For her, this does not mean, however, that children should be left "to their own devices," which, for her, would mean

to “strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us” (ibid.). Instead, she writes, we need “to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (ibid.). While it is not entirely clear what she believes should be put, or left in their hands, or how exactly we can prepare students to renew the world, it is clear that she considers it as an essential task of education to familiarize the new generation with the world as it exists for the previous generation (including traditions, values, etc.), as a prerequisite for being able to bring something new to the world.⁶¹

This is similar to the idea of in-fancy in several ways. First of all, both in-fancy and natality, contain a reference to a development state: where in-fancy (as a constitutive feature of speech) makes a connection between the development of language in the species and the individual, natality refers to the biological fact of birth of individuals, as something that is present in every action. As such, the fact of birth is not just an event in the past (of an individual), but something that “daily renews” this world itself, which otherwise would perish along with the death of individuals (Arendt, 1958, pp. 246-7; 2003, p. 49). In other words, for Arendt, the fact of natality could be said to be a prerequisite of the fact of freedom that manifests itself in our ability to do or say something radically new. She writes:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon

⁶¹ She writes, for example, that “by its very nature,” education “cannot forgo either authority or tradition,” and, that “we must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to apply to it alone a concept of authority,” and, finally, that “the function of the world is to teach children what the world is and not to instruct them in the art of living” (2006, p. 195).

ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity.... Its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. (Arendt, 1998: pp. 176-7)

Similar to the way in which Agamben posits the experience of in-fancy (that we can speak) as a fact, Arendt also does not seek to explain how freedom is possible, rather, she simply acknowledges the fact of natality: that we are born, that we can begin something new on our own initiative. And, again, similar to in-fancy, the fact of natality (as does the fact of in-fancy, i.e., that we can speak) points to a radical openness with regard to our ability to express ourselves (be it in acts, or words).

A difference could be seen in the fact that natality emphasizes action over language. While Arendt talks about deeds *and* words, it is the *act* of birth, and ultimately the *act* of speaking, of bringing new deeds and words into the world, and of *interacting* with others that Arendt seems to emphasize. "In acting and speaking," Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* (1998), "men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (1998, p. 179). At the same time, however, she also makes it clear that "[w]ithout the accompaniment of speech ... action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject" (ibid., p. 178). The revelatory character is essential, for Arendt, because it allows for "a 'disclosure of 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is'" (ibid., p. 179). Nevertheless, the emphasis is clearly on the 'act,' in 'speech act,' whereas

the reverse is the case for Agamben. Another important difference is that in-fancy is about an experience (or ontological state), whereas natality is expressed/manifested in the act itself, and its result, such as revealing one's individuality.

One way of describing Arendt's notion of natality (and its role in education), in Agambenian terms, is to see natality as a broader concept than in-fancy, corresponding to Agamben's notion of im-potentiality. In other words, in-fancy could be thought of as a kind of natality, namely the natality (ability to be born) of language. While there is still a difference between the emphasis on the action (for Arendt), and experience (for Agamben), and, between the significance of what is being said as an expression of the unique personal identity of the speaker (Arendt), and as an expression of a whatever being (for Agamben), the idea of natality may nevertheless be seen as at least compatible with the idea of in-fancy, insofar as it sees the possibility for something radically new to come into the world as an essential aspect of education.

4.5. Genuine Encounters and Experience as the New (Illich)

As is the case for Dewey and Arendt, the idea that education is about allowing something new to emerge, is also central to Illich's conception of education (1970). For him, the problem with institutionalized schooling is that the teaching that happens in schools doesn't allow for real (natural) learning. What Illich believes is necessary for real learning to occur is to create situations in which students have certain experiences that are only made possible by genuine educational encounters. A genuine educational encounter, for him, is one in which one person has a genuine desire (need/interest) to learn something, and another person has a genuine desire to share his or her knowledge or

skills with that person. For Illich, it is these kinds of encounters that are not possible in traditional schooling, which is why he believes that schools need to be replaced by institutions that “serve personal, creative, and autonomous interaction” (1970, p. 2). So not only does he consider such encounters to be what makes real, that is, natural learning possible, their significance for education consists in the fact that engaging in real (natural) learning allows for a particular kind of experience to become possible. For Illich, what makes this experience valuable is not that it allows for the realization of specific outcomes, but that it allows for what he calls “personal growth,” or “immeasurable re-creation”—where “immeasurable” is understood in contrast to “quantifiable” outcomes or values, as promoted by traditional schooling (ibid., p. 40).

The defining feature of the experience that makes “personal growth” or “immeasurable re-creation” possible, is that of the emergence of something new and unexpected, something surprising, something that was not there before. Education, he writes, “relies on the surprise of the unexpected question which opens new doors for the inquirer and his partner” (ibid., p. 17). For Illich, it is exactly (the possibility for) an experience of newness that is missing in institutionalized teaching, leading students to “value only what has been made or could be made” (ibid., p. 40). In other words, what education should be about, for Illich, is an experience that cannot be measured, evaluated or approved by the institution of the school, because it is not something that “has been made or could be made” (ibid.), and, thus, is not about *making* at all. Such experience, according to Illich, is only possible when we do not close ourselves off “to the surprises which life offers when it is not predetermined by institutional definition” (ibid., p. 47).

And it is in this sense that we should understand his statement that “[d]eschooling is ... at the root of any movement for human liberation” (ibid.), given that, for him, deschooling leads to the possibility of genuine educational encounters that allow for experiences of the new and, thus, the possibility of the liberation from the old.

What distinguishes Illich from Dewey, is a shift from arguing that experience in education should be directed toward new *and better* experiences, to arguing that education should be about the experience of the new as such, without being directed at new *and better* experiences. So, while there is still an element of directionality (toward the new), in contrast to Dewey, Illich places the emphasis not on the actualization of new and better experiences in the future, but on the realization of an experience of the (neither qualifiable nor quantifiable) new, in the present.

What remains unclear is whether what emerges in the kinds of genuine educational encounters Illich envisions is merely an experience of something new for the inquirer and his or her partner, that is, a new *experience* (“staying open for the surprises that life offers”)—in which case such experience would remain purely immanent and lack all directionality. Or, if it also implies some idea of (however immeasurable) personal growth (as the term *re-creation*, seems to suggest)—in which case the question is how such directionality can be reconciled with the idea of radical openness that appears to be the defining feature of the kind of experience made possible in genuine educational encounters. Lastly, we may wonder if, when Illich writes that such genuine encounters can “open new doors for the inquirer and his partner” (ibid., p. 17), the new has to be only new for the inquirer (and her partner) to make the experience Illich has in mind

possible, or if it also needs to introduce something radically new to the world (i.e., new to everyone)—the latter being more in line with Arendt idea of introducing radically new deeds and words into the world.

The element of in-fancy is most evident in Illich's conception of education where he talks about genuine educational experience as being made possible through an encounter between two or more inquirers, some of whom genuinely wanting to learn, and some genuinely wanting to teach, but leaving it open/undetermined as to what is being revealed, or discovered in the process. As is the case with Dewey, and, at least in part, with Arendt, the focus is not on language, but there is clearly an emphasis on the experience of the new, as something that Illich considers valuable in itself—made possible by a process of communication without pre-conceive goals or outcomes. More than for Arendt or Dewey, the emphasis, for Illich, is on the *experience* of the new (rather than its realization). But, like Dewey, Illich also maintains an element of directionality in his idea of inquiry, so when he speaks of opening new doors, or of personal growth. Only that this directionality seems to be understood in more existential, rather than either scientific (Dewey), or political (Arendt) terms. In terms of containing the idea of in-fancy as important for education, it is most clearly expressed in his emphasis on the need for encounters that allow for the experience of something radically new, and un-determined as a central tenet of education.

4.6. Emergence of Radically New Ways of Speaking (Biesta)

The question of the new, and the experience of the new, is given new urgency in the work of Biesta, for whom the key question is how educational encounters can allow

students to transcend “their” world (i.e., the world of their families, peers, pop-culture) by presenting them with something that is new *for them*, while also giving them an opportunity to contribute something radically/objectively new, i.e., something new *as such*. Biesta (2014) stresses the importance of preserving the role of the teacher to provide students with an opportunity to transcend their worlds. But in spite of his emphasis on the role of the teacher, he believes that the teacher has ultimately no control over whether or not the student will, as Biesta puts it, accept the “gift of teaching” (2014, p. 44), stating that the “outcome of this process can neither be guaranteed nor secured” (ibid., p. 3). Biesta calls this approach to education “weak education” (ibid, p. 1), meaning that it is, for him, primarily about “humans interacting,” instead of being conceived in more mechanistic terms, as some sort of “educational technology” that could lead to “a perfect match between ‘input’ and ‘output’” (ibid.). A key component of weak education, for Biesta, is what he calls a “pedagogy of the event” (ibid., p. 139) aimed at the creation of subjectivity. “Subjectification,” for him, is only one aspect of what he sees as the tasks of education (the other two being “qualification,” and “socialization”). But he considers it (at least) equally important to the other two, assuming we don’t want education to be simply about the “reproduction of what we already know or of what already exists,” and are “genuinely interested in the ways in which new beginnings and new beginners can come into the world“ (ibid., p. 4). In an Arendtian spirit, Biesta emphasizes the need for (the experience of) the realization of the radically (objectively) new, which, for him, is made possible “when individuals resist existing identities and identity-positions and speak on their own terms” (ibid., p. 7).

While this is ultimately quite similar to Illich's emphasis on the *experience* of the new, there is also a clearly Arendtian element, in that he emphasizes the need to allow students to bring something actually new into the world. There is also a shift toward language, in that the new is conceived primarily in terms of new ways of speaking, and, more specifically, of speaking on one's own terms, which makes this more similar to in-fancy. At the same time, Biesta's notion of the new, retains a certain degree of directionality, reflected in the importance he places on the radically new, which raises the question (also with regard to Arendt) of why bringing something radically new into the world should be considered valuable as such, and independent of the kind of experience that this makes possible for the individual. In other words: In what sense is it *better* that something new is introduced into the world, than if it isn't? And for whom? Moreover, when Biesta writes that we should allow students to speak "on their own terms," this seems to imply that there already exists some kind of potential in the student (an identity?) that needs to be actualized.

In summary, we can say that while there are some aspects of the idea of in-fancy in Biesta's conception of education, we may wonder if it is not possible to describe the key idea in his work in ways that are more in line with the idea of in-fancy, by referring to a (more basic) experience of the possibility of new ways of speaking as being in itself educationally valuable. It is this idea that we find expressed in the work of Masschelein and Simons.

4.7. Experience as Potentiality for New Ways of Speaking (Masschelein & Simons)

While presenting a very similar critique of what Illich calls institutionalized schooling, Masschelein and Simons (2013) come to opposite conclusions with regard to the role of the school in society. While Illich believes that we need to abolish institutionalized schooling, Masschelein and Simons see the school as a refuge and a safeguard against the privatization and economization of education. For them, we need to preserve the school to allow for exactly the kind of experience Illich is advocating. Like Biesta, they emphasize the role of the teacher (and the school, more generally) of exposing students to something that transcends their “own” world (that is, the world of their families, peers, pop-culture), in order to allow them to experience newness, and new ways of speaking, in particular. But in the work of Masschelein and Simons, we find an opening to the ability to speak, as such, which Biesta merely presupposes but never fully explores. They write: “[H]ow can [the students] renew the world—how can they experience ‘newness’—if no one actually introduces them to the old world and brings the old world to life?” (2013, p. 87)—stressing that students should be free to use the old (for us/others) in new ways. So here, the new remains unspecified, given that it is left up to the students to decide what that new is going to be. For Masschelein and Simons, the teacher is presenting the student with something she deems important, while, at the same time, declaring: “I cannot and will not tell you how to use it later on (in society)” (*ibid.*, p. 61). Insofar as this gives students an opportunity to transcend their own world (without therefore simply adopting what they are presented with), the school, for Masschelein and Simons, “always has to do with the experience of potentiality” (*ibid.*)

But the emphasis for Masschelein and Simons is not on the potential that lies in the student (e.g., to speak on her *own* terms), but on the potential of the things that are being studied and practiced to be used in new ways.⁶² According to Masschelein and Simons, study should here be understood as “knowledge for the sake of knowledge,” and practice as “ability for the sake of ability” (ibid., p. 62). They continue:

Study and practice are activities that no longer serve (a means to) an end or final purpose, but rather make new connections possible precisely because they are removed from it [a final purpose]. This situation in which something is separated from its supposed purpose and made open to new connections is ... a situation in which one [i.e., the student] experiences the ability and possibility to speak (in a new, novel way that makes new links between words and things), to act, to see, etc.. (ibid, p. 62)

So here we could say that, for the authors, education is no longer (primarily) about the experience of the new, but about the experience of the *ability and possibility* of the new. The particular phrasing and punctuation used here are significant, because, while it retains the new, it does so only parenthetically, suggesting that, for the authors, it is no longer the new that accounts for the value of the experience, but the *possibility* of the (unqualified) new, the *ability* to “make() new links between words and things,” not its actualization.

⁶² I would like to thank Jan Masschelein for clarifying this point for me in personal conversation.

Assuming that this is a possible way to read this passage, this seems to come very close to the idea in-fancy. The question that remains is how we can think of the “experience of potentiality” and the possibility and ability of the new as such as educationally valuable, that is, without referring to some ultimately external goal or outcome (be it new experiences, new deeds and words, or personal growth) that would refer to some external goal or outcome as what ultimately accounts for its educational value. And we may wonder, how we are to think of the role of the teacher without such an external goal or outcome. It is the latter question that is being addressed in the next section, where I will consider the work of Rancière, for whom the possibility of an experience that he sees as central to education, requires that the teacher have nothing to teach.

4.8. Experience of the Equality of Intelligences (Rancière)

The focus in the previously discussed conceptions of education is on an experience for which the relationship between teacher and student is crucial. In this section, I will look at a conception of education (Rancière, 1989), in which the role of the teacher consists more in what she is not doing, and doesn’t know, than in what she does or knows, in order to bring about a certain experience that, as I will try to show, resembles that of in-fancy. Briefly put, we could say that Rancière sees the role of the teacher as that of creating an experience of immanence for students that allows them to experience the equality of their own and everybody else’s intelligence, as what accounts for the condition of the possibility of any kind of transcendence, and, thus, for the ability to learn, as such. What Rancière adds to what has already been said about the experience

of in-fancy in education, is the role of the teacher in bringing about that kind of experience. For Rancière, the mutual recognition of those involved in the educational process as equals, allows for an experience of the equality of all intelligences, which, as I will show in the following, corresponds to the communal experience of in-fancy that I distinguished as one of the facets of in-fancy.

The way I understand his use of the term “intelligence,” is that it refers to our very ability to think, and to speak. And when he speaks of individuals recognizing each other as equals, I take this to mean that they recognize that ability to think and to speak, in each other—an ability that allows each human being, in principal, to think and say what any other person is able to think or say. In other words, human beings can recognize each other as having the same kind of capability—the ability to speak and, in principle, to express anything that everybody else can express. While Rancière does emphasize more the constructive/collaborative than the communal aspect of the effect on the students (i.e., the students’ ability to learn without being taught), we see the communal dimension contained in the recognition of each other as equals (in the sense that Rancière uses the term), and the nature and value of the community that is formed based on this premise, expressed in the following quote: “The principal service that man can expect from man depends on that faculty of intercommunicating their pleasure and pain, hopes and fears, in order to be moved reciprocally [i.e. language, speech]: ‘... The exercise of that power is at once the sweetest of our pleasures and the most demanding of our needs.’” (1989, p. 72).

What I hope to have shown so far, is that there is a tradition in educational philosophy and theory that acknowledges in-fancy in some form as central to education. The goal was not to find a “perfect match” for how Agamben uses the terms, rather my intention was to use in-fancy, as a paradigm, to make certain aspects or constellations in in these conceptions of education visible that may otherwise remain hidden, and to show a kinship between these different conceptions that may otherwise appear incommensurable. While the theorists considered so far differ with regard to the degree to which the idea of infancy is expressed, what they have in common is an emphasis on the importance of allowing for something new to be experienced or and/or being brought into the world—as valuable in itself. Another common feature, is that they are all non-utopian, in nature, in that they are not about, as Biesta puts it, quoting Rancière, “an ‘end-state’ to be achieved at some moment in the future” (Biesta, p. 7?). But the question that remains with regard to these manifestations of in-fancy, is whether there is a way to conceive of the experience of the possibility of new ways of speaking (and acting), whose value does not lie in the *actualization* of the new, but as being educationally valuable, by itself. Masschelein and Simons may have expressed that idea most clearly, but even they lack a way to articulate the value of the experience itself, without referring to the potential to allow the students to transcend “their” worlds. In other words, the question, that, in a way brings us back to Dewey, is: How can we articulate the educational value expressed in these different manifestations of in-fancy in education in such a way as to capture the immanence of the experience, as well as the transcendent momentum that prevents the experience from remaining purely immanent.

4.9. *Study as a Weakly Utopian Practice (Lewis)*

In this concluding section of the chapter, I present Lewis' notion of *study*, as a *weakly-utopian* practice, as the defining feature of his conception of education. Given that Lewis' notion of study is itself derived from Agamben, it is not surprising that his articulation of the kind of experience that has been traced in various conceptions of education comes closest to Agamben's own formulation of the idea of in-fancy. As the idea of in-fancy has allowed us to identify different constellations, and shifts in emphasis with regard to experience and the notion of the new, Lewis' conception of education, and his notion of *study* as a weakly-utopian practice, adds another such shift in emphasis, and another articulation of the role of experience in education. More specifically, what Lewis' notion of study allows us to do, is to see in-fancy in education as containing an element of transcendence (directionality toward something) that remains itself immanent to the educational practice. Rather than seeing this as a solution to the problem (or paradox) of experience in education, it is simply another articulation, another constellation, as it were, of the nature and value of educational practice—articulations that, themselves, remain immanent to the practice of educational philosophy.

Before discussing Lewis' notion of study, and how he arrives at his understanding of study, based on the experience of in-fancy, as a weakly-utopian practice, I will briefly summarize Agamben's notion of in-fancy. As we have already seen, for Agamben the experience of in-fancy is intimately connected to language and the fact that experience cannot be thought without language, but always consists in more than just language. For Agamben, in-fancy, located on the margin or threshold of language and not language,

could be said to be experience in its most pure form. It retains in its meaning the transitional state of the emergence of language (both, in the species, and the individual), which, once we are able to speak, continues to be present in every speech act. As a zone of indistinguishability between language and non-language, infancy is also the source (and a prerequisite for the possibility) of new ways of speaking. In contrast to some of the conceptions previously discussed (e.g., Dewey's broadly scientific understanding of experience as engaging in the pursuit of the new), rather than being (permanently) located outside of experience, for Agamben, the new is already contained in the very idea of experience.⁶³ But not in the sense of already existing (potentially or actually) in experience, so that it is simply an actualization of something that already existed as a potential. Rather, we should think of in-fancy as an experience within every particular speech act, that is itself a manifestation of one of an infinite number of equally possible, and equally valid/invalid (but un-actualized) articulations (that, in a state of in-fancy, are preserved as un-realized but equally possible articulations). Using an Agambenian turn of phrase, we could say that the new is present in experience as the 'new *as not* new.'⁶⁴

What makes experience, understood in this emphatic sense (i.e., *qua* infancy) inherently valuable for Agamben is that it represents an ontologically more basic state (of openness

⁶³ For Agamben, the problem with equating experience with scientific experience, is that, "the search for the 'new' does not appear as the search for a new object of experience; instead, it implies an eclipse and a suspension of experience. New is what cannot be experienced, because it lies 'in the depths of the unknown': the Kantian thing-in-itself, the inexperiencible as such" (2007, pp. 35 ff.).

⁶⁴ This also means that experience, *qua* infancy, is not only a zone of indistinguishability between language and not language, but also between the old (immanence) and the new (transcendence). In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben writes: "In this way, the messianic vocation is a movement of immanence, or, if one prefers, a zone of absolute indiscernibility between immanence and transcendence, between this world and the future world" (2005, p. 25).

toward possible articulations) that is presupposed in any particular actualization of speech, and that dwelling in such a state is a fuller realization of whatever freedom is possible for human beings: our ability to speak—and, thus, be—‘otherwise than,’ without any preconceived notion of what this otherwise might be.

It is this emphatic idea of the experience of in-fancy as the realization of an essential, and, for Agamben, defining feature of our humanity, that forms the basis of Lewis’ notion of study, as an educational practice. Notably, Lewis uses (as point of departure) an existing educational activity as exemplary for education (in general) that does not involve a teacher—as studying is typically done alone, or with one’s peers. Because of the absence of the teacher as the primary, external source of the new (for the student), and, more generally, as representative of the idea of outcome-oriented learning, study lacks directionality toward a specific, predetermined outcome. Drawing here directly from Agamben, Lewis calls studying an “‘interminable’ activity,” that “not only loses a sense of its own end but, more importantly, ‘does not even desire one’” (2013, p. 17). As such, studying “interrupts any notion of educational ‘growth’ or educational ‘realization’ of willful self-production” (ibid., p. 25). And: “Instead of obsessing on ends, evaluations, and measurements, the kind of thinking experienced through study suspends the very logic of means and ends altogether” (ibid., p. 36). The lack of preconceived goals or outcomes, in turn, fundamentally changes the way the studier experiences time. Given that, without preconceived ends, there is always more to study, studying, for Lewis, represents an “interminable,” and potentially infinite activity. This element of a radical openness to infinite possibilities, in turn, introduces a “future eternity ... to the

everyday” (ibid., p. 100) which allows for the “constant emergence of the possibility of new uses within the space and time of the now” (ibid., p. 107). For Lewis, this also means that study “short-circuits definitive boundaries between the past, present, and the future” (ibid.), creating a “moment of radical transformation within the very immanence of the presence” (ibid., p. 102).⁶⁵

The shift in emphasis with regard to the manifestations of in-fancy previously considered, is one from an emphasis on the *realization* of the new, toward an experience of potentiality as such (independent of the actualization of the new). This may seem like a minor shift in emphasis, and, it is indeed minor in the sense that it preserves in a certain sense the directionality toward the new, as it is found in Dewey’s notion of new and better facts, ideas, discoveries, new deeds or words (Arendt), the experience of the new (Illich), the realization of the potential of the student to speak on her own terms (Biesta), and certainly the experience of the possibility of the new (Masschelein and Simons). The decisive difference is that here the new is not thought of as something beyond the immanence of the present situation, whose future realization accounts for the value of the experience. Instead, the new is seen as something that is contained in the experience of potentiality, but it is the experience of potentiality, independent of the new, that makes the experience valuable. In other words, studying entails (within its immanence) an intimation of the (transcendent) new that provides the momentum that keeps the studier studying. We may think this momentum as a directional remnant of a more conventional

⁶⁵ In a similar way, he describes the *space* of study (“messianic space”) as a space of “ease,” “wherein all destinations are suspended” (ibid., p. 105).

notion of educational experience that accounts for the feasibility of studying in traditional educational settings.

To capture the immanently transcendental nature of studying, Lewis refers to it as a *weakly-utopian* practice (neither utopian, nor simply non-utopian), that is, an experience that is valuable in itself, in the present (immanent), while, at the same time, containing the future (and the past) as possibilities, which makes it also (weakly/immanently) transcendent: “The temporality of weak utopianism,” Lewis writes,

is not simply the messianic time of the now, but also the temporality of perpetual study where the student holds judgment in suspension in order to touch the im-potentiality of thought itself—the weakness in thought that cannot be made into a form of knowledge. (ibid., p. 107)

This may, again, seem like a relatively minor shift in conceiving of experience in education, but it allows us to articulate a significantly different idea of education, traces of which can, as we have seen, be detected in the work of other philosophers of education, whose work, in turn, can help to give credence to such a different way of conceiving of education.

In terms of what ultimately accounts for the value of the practice of study, Lewis introduces the concept of *ease*. Ease, for him, is an ontological state that is made possible by the experience we have when we study, and, in particular, by a certain kind of temporality, and a radical openness to possibilities, where each actualized fact, idea, insight, skill, is experienced as one of an infinite number of possible actualizations that are preserved in their im-potentiality. It is characterized by a state of ignorance or

dwelling in a “zone of non-knowledge” (ibid., p. 133) that lacks “any desire for mastery,” or “desire to reach an end beyond ease itself” (ibid., p. 48). For Lewis, being in such a state is inherently pleasurable. We can experience ease both when studying alone, or when studying with others, in which case Lewis speaks of “studying with friends” (ibid., p. 136ff), and of “being at ease with one’s friends” (ibid., p. 148). As a communal activity, studying allows for the possibility of a particular kind of relationship to one’s fellow studiers (or friends), namely of what Lewis, in reference to Agamben, calls *love*: “To study with a friend is to love one with all his or her predicates, his or her being as such” (ibid.). The reason for this is that the community of friends that study together is not directed at a particular goal or outcome, that is, it has “no destination,” and is therefore an “inoperative community” (ibid., p. 138). As such, “this community is not a means to another end, but is a pure means, a pure experiment in being-in-common, of sharing whatever remains when foundations are abandoned” (ibid., p. 139)—pointing here to the facet of in-fancy that is also present in Socratic philosophy and Nietzsche’s Dionysian experience of a “higher community.” Similar to the way in which the communal experience of in-fancy creates a relationship between the members of the community at a level between language and not-language (rather than at a purely conceptual level), Lewis describes the community of studiers as one, where: “Friends share the sharing that is ontologically prior to the division between friends and enemies, prior to this or that set of culturally specific predicates” (ibid., p. 138).

By articulating the nature and value of experience of educational practice based on the notion of in-fancy, Lewis provides us with a direct link between the practice of

philosophy (as based on the experience of in-fancy), and its inclusion in an education setting. We can now see the educational value of philosophy for infancy, that is, like study, an “interminable activity,” a form of “perpetual study” that is utopian/transcendent only in the sense that engaging in the practice is a form of life that is defined by the very fact that it is not utopian (in the conventional sense). Rather than being “about positing a model for a future perfection (as with many classical Utopias),” weak or “messianic utopianism,” for Lewis, should be understood as “an education in our own in-capability for utopian imagining within the present without committing to any one determinate form” (*ibid.*, p. 107-108, italics in original).

Returning here again to Dewey, we could say that the kind of experience Dewey describes as neither educative nor simply un-educative, can be thought of as valuable precisely because of the lack of continuity that makes it, in Dewey’s eyes, “less than educative.” But rather than proposing to replace the kind of experience that Dewey sees as necessary for the creation of continuity (between past and future experiences) with a purely dis-continuous experience (based on in-fancy) in education, in general, what I am proposing is merely that as long as we can show that the experience of in-fancy is educationally valuable, education should also include practices (such as the practice of philosophy) that allow for ‘less than educative’ experience, as part of, or, in addition to, more directional kinds of practices and activities.⁶⁶ Freed from the traditional logic of

⁶⁶ The reason Dewey himself could not conceive of the inclusion of the practice of philosophy in education, is that he could not see how any activity that is not (at least also) directed toward something (better experiences in the future) could be thought of as educationally valuable. But that doesn’t mean that the inclusion of an activity that can realize what he himself considers as essential for the realization of a democratic society (and, more generally, our human nature), is not compatible with his idea of education.

education, the experience of a radical openness with regard to possible expressions does not have to be seen in instrumental terms at all, not even in the sense of an increased capacity for the realization of the new. Rather, the experience of being in what Agamben describes as an ontologically more basic state of im-potentiality itself should be regarded as a possible, and inherently desirable form of (educational) life among others.

4.10. Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the idea of in-fancy can be located in a number of prominent conceptions of education, each of which emphasizes at least some of the facets of the experience, with Lewis' notion of study coming closest to articulating a conception of education based on an Agambenian notion of in-fancy. What locating the idea of in-fancy in these different conceptions of education has allowed me to do, is to show in what sense the practice of philosophy (as a practice that makes the experience of in-fancy possible), can also be seen as educationally valuable. It is the role of the practice of philosophy in education that will be considered in the following chapters, in more detail: In the following chapter, I will look at existing approaches of doing philosophy with children, and the degree to which they are compatible with the practice of philosophy based on in-fancy. In chapter 6, I will take a closer look at the practice of philosophy for in-fancy at the classroom-level. In chapter 7, finally, I will discuss the value (or *use*) of the practice in the school as a whole, and in society.

Chapter 5: In-fancy in Approaches to Philosophy with Children

5.1. Introduction

So far, I have argued that the experience of in-fancy can be seen as a defining feature of both the practice of philosophy (chapter 3), and, that it is also contained (in some form) in a number of conceptions of education that are based on the idea that education should be based on experience (chapter 4), concluding that the practice of philosophy may be seen as valuable in education, because it allows for the experience of in-fancy. The purpose of this chapter is to locate the experience of in-fancy in existing conceptions of philosophy with children, to determine whether those approaches (in terms of practice and/or theory) support, or are at least compatible with the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice.

While individual philosophers throughout the history of philosophy (notably, John Locke and Michel Montaigne) have suggested that children should be exposed to philosophical ideas, that children should themselves engage in doing philosophy is a relatively new idea. Besides some efforts undertaken in this direction in the 1910s and 1920s in Germany by philosophers and educational theorists such as Fritz Gansberg (see Enders, 2003), Herman Nohl (1922), Arthur Liebert (1927), Leonard Nelson (1993), and Walter Benjamin (2014), it is primarily due to the Philosophy for Children (P4C)-program, inaugurated in the 1970s by Matthew Lipman, that philosophy with children was established, worldwide, in a systematic and sustained way (Lipman et al, 1980; Lipman, 1988, 2003; Mathews 1980; 1994). The main idea here is that children

themselves should do philosophy rather than being introduced to philosophical texts, or by engaging in some simplified version of academic philosophy.

The original P4C-approach (as discussed in Chapter 2) has since giving rise to a wide array of practices and conceptualizations of the practice (Guocha, 2007; Marsal et al, 2009; Tozzi, 2009; UNESCO, 2011; Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2012, Gregory et al, 2017), with sometimes different names (e.g., Philosophy with Children, Philosophy in Schools, Philosophy for Young People, etc.) that may or may not reflect a difference in terms of the approach.⁶⁷ Within the P4C-movement, a distinction is sometimes made between first- and second generation representatives (Kennedy & Vansieleghem, 2012; Väitalo, 2016), to emphasize the continuity between the original approach and newer variants of the practice. This is somewhat misleading because it seems to suggest that the original approach has been replaced, which is not the case. It also blurs the differences between these variants of the practice, implying that newer variants represent only non-essential modifications to the original approach, instead of treating them as alternative models of the practice that need to be examined on their own terms. Rather than adopting this terminology, I will, in the following, use “Philosophy with Children” as the generic term for any practice that engages students in an activity that may be considered philosophical (however broadly conceived). I will use “Philosophy for Children” (P4C)

⁶⁷ A difference in designation does not necessarily reflect a significant difference with regard to theory and/or practice, while there are approaches that divert significantly from the original P4C-approach that continue to use the P4C-label (e.g., Kohan, 2012; Vansieleghem, 2005, 2012). For an overview over existing approaches, see *Children Philosophize Worldwide*, 2009, and, *Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*, Gregory et al, 2017. For differences in the practice, see the following literature-reviews on empirical research on Philosophy for Children: Cebas & Moriyon, 2003; Topping & Trickey, 2004; Daniel, 2008). See also: Jasinski (2013), Empirical Research in Philosophy for Children: Outcomes and Practices. A Systematic Review of the Literature (unpublished paper).

to refer to the original Lipmann-approach, and to approaches that themselves use the designation P4C. Lastly, I will use “Philosophy for Infancy” (P4I) to describe my own conceptualization of the practice as an approach of doing philosophy with children that is (explicitly) based on the experience of in-fancy. Given the wide range of approaches, both in terms of practices and their theoretical underpinnings, the purpose of this chapter is not to provide an overview or assessment of existing approaches of philosophy with children. Rather, my intention is to locate the idea of in-fancy in the original P4C-approach and in some of its variants, in order to determine to what degree the idea of the practice based on in-fancy is compatible with those approaches.

As I already pointed out in the first chapter, my differences with the original P4C-approach concerned only those aspects of the practice that were directed at the realization of specific goals. While, in the second chapter, I focused on how my experience with the practice led me to divert from the original P4C-approach, my focus here will be on the theoretical underpinnings of the original P4C-approach, arguing that the theoretical underpinnings can be interpreted in such a way as to be make them compatible with the idea of in-fancy. Next, I will look at proponents of alternative conceptions of philosophy with children that have criticized the original P4C approach for its directedness toward specific goals or outcomes as contradicting the inherently non-instrumental nature of philosophical inquiry (Vansieleghem, 2005, 2012; Biesta, 2012; Kohan, 2012; 2015). I examine these alternative models for their compatibility with a practice based on in-fancy, concluding that abandoning all procedural components (such as the ones found in the original P4C-model) risks making the practice no longer recognizable as

philosophical. I then consider positions that combine a commitment to philosophy as a non-instrumental practice with the use of procedural, and methodological features (Martens, 2008, 2012; Weber, 2008; Marsal et al, 2009; Marsal, 2011)—positions that reflect my own view that a procedural framework is necessary to preserve the practice as specifically philosophical, and as what makes it feasible in a formal education setting.

5.2. Directional and Non-Directional Elements in the Foundations of P4C

While the P4C-practice itself is based on a particular kind of pedagogy that consists in procedures and instructional materials, aimed at the accomplishment of specific learning and developmental goals (reflected in the comprehensive methodological and didactic materials developed by the IAPC that also accounted for the success of the P4C-program in schools),⁶⁸ the theoretical underpinnings of the P4C-movement have from the beginning consisted in a range of (more or less compatible) philosophical commitments (e.g., Gregory, 2012). As I will try to show, it is possible to distinguish between those aspects of the theoretical underpinnings that are consistent with philosophy based on the experience of in-fancy, and other aspects—namely those that most closely align with the practice and its objectives—that are not. I begin by a close examination of one of the early/founding texts of P4C: *Philosophy in the Classroom*, Lipman et al (1980). While it may not be possible to completely eliminate what I see as inherent tensions in the original P4C-approach (both, in the theoretical foundations, and

⁶⁸ In the early foundational/programmatic P4C-texts, it is clearly presented as an effort at school reform. In *Philosophy in the Classroom* (1980), for example, Lipman et al, state that we need “an educational system of maximum intrinsic value ..., maximum meaningfulness and rationality, and maximum methodological unity and consistency” (ibid., p3), proposing the implementation of a K-12-program for P4C, with specific methodology and pedagogy, that would help serve this purpose (ibid., 54ff.).

between theory and practice), I believe that it is possible to read the text in such a way as to make it compatible with a practice based on in-fancy. I will offer two possible readings of the aforementioned text, to show what I see as a tension contained therein, before proposing a way to reconcile these two readings.

Emphasizing the directional aspects of the text (Lipman et al, 1980), we could say that P4C is portrayed as a goal-oriented, outcome-based, directional practice, whose goal is to help students become better thinkers, which, in turn, will allow them to lead better lives. According to this reading, thinking well means that there are certain common (and generally accepted) standards of thinking that equate good thinking with thinking according to the rules of logic. The authors write, for example: “The interest of the individual in the improved management of his own life must be acknowledged to have first priority, for we can have no better incentive than to see our lives improve upon our thinking them through” (1980, pp. xiii-xiv). Elaborating on what they mean by “thinking them [our lives] through,” the authors write: “The richer the array of inferences that can be logically or linguistically inferred by children from what they read, perceive, or otherwise experience, the more satisfying and more wholesome will those experiences seem to them” (ibid., p. 16). What is presupposed here is that there are certain rules of rationality (logic) that are essential (constitutive) for the way we (should) talk and act, and that applying these rules is the (best) route to living qualitatively better lives. From this follows that the role of the teacher is to move the dialogue to increasingly more rational talk in order to make the students into “more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate, and more reasonable individuals” (ibid., p. 15).

But there is also another way of reading this early P4C text that is more in line with the idea of the practice of philosophy as an experience of in-fancy, suggesting that the development of thinking skills and logic is only one aspect of philosophical inquiry. In a passage where the authors address the question of whether teaching specific procedural rules of good thinking (such as coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness) may not itself be a form of indoctrination, they respond by stating that coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness “are values only in the sense that they are standards for effective communication and criteria for effective inquiry. They are appropriate to the *way* a person should think, not to *what* he should think” (ibid., p. 86). In other words, such standards are “*procedural* considerations, not *substantive* ones” (ibid.). Secondly, and more importantly, the authors further relativize the role of such basic rules of rational discourse, by conceding that “there are other forms of activity in which these rules are hindrances rather than aids” (ibid.). “[C]oherence, comprehensiveness, and consistency,” they continue, “are appropriate values for philosophical discussion and inquiry but not for other aspects of a person’s life [e.g. playing, doing chores] that include characteristics of spontaneity, randomness, or routine to which the aforementioned values are irrelevant” (ibid.). So here the authors suggest that while rational discourse is most appropriate and suitable for engaging in philosophical inquiry, it isn’t in some contexts or situations. Qualifying this point further, they write: “It would be a mistake to suppose that formal logic alone will promote philosophical thinking” (ibid., p. 133). While it can help children

think in an organized way, it gives no clues as to when thinking by the rules of formal logic is useful and appropriate and when it is simply absurd. Critical thinking only becomes philosophic thinking when it is aware of limitations to its own critical standards. And formal logic alone does not provide such insight. (ibid., p. 133)

So here the authors clearly state that a key component of the use of critical thinking (i.e., “thinking by the rules of formal logic”) in philosophy is that it needs to be aware of the limitations of its own critical standards (its limited validity and limited usefulness). And for this to happen, they add, children should be made aware of other, contrasting ways of thought, such as “imagining, dreaming, pretending, in which logical rules play little or no part,” concluding that: “Through coming to appreciate and enjoy this broad variety of kinds of thinking, they can then realize that while their thinking often has logical form (and occasionally fails to when it should), much of it does not and need not” (ibid., p. 152).

Without developing this thought further here, it seems to me that it would be relatively easy, based on the above observations, to re-conceptualize the practice of P4C in the following way: Philosophical inquiry is a continuous process of questioning, an “endless quest for meaning” (ibid., p. 84), without any expectation to reach answers. Moreover, there is no ultimate truth, and logical reasoning is only one of many ways of thinking (although one that has historically been privileged), but not one that should be considered the only, or even the most important way of thinking or communicating. It may be one of the things we can teach students to help them organize and communicate

their thoughts (more effectively), but it is equally important that we acknowledge that there is more to thinking (for oneself) and communicating, than logic. To allow students to realize that this is indeed the case, the conversation in P4C should not only—or even primarily—be about learning to reason well, but should allow for a wide range of speech that makes students realize the relative value of making arguments and assertions.

In other words, I believe that it is possible to re-configure the theoretical foundations of the original P4C-approach in such a way as to make it compatible with the idea of in-fancy as the defining feature of the practice. The question is whether (and if so, how) this reading can be reconciled with the *practice* used in the original P4C-approach (see also chapter 2), given that the latter is clearly directed at specific outcomes with regard to the development of thinking-skills and reasonableness. In other words, to make the original P4C approach as a whole compatible with one based on in-fancy, the practice would have to change from one that emphasizes the development of specific skills, to one that puts more emphasis on allowing for the particular kind of experience that is made possible through the practice of philosophy (i.e., in-fancy), as the defining feature, and ultimate value, of the practice.

5.3. Critique of the Original P4C-Approach and Alternatives

Critiques of the traditional P4C-approach have been directed at the philosophical commitments underlying the original P4C-approach, and/or at the instrumental nature of the practice (in general, and, especially, in education). The philosophical commitments underlying P4C have been questioned (on philosophical grounds), for presupposing a universally valid idea of rationality (Vansieleghem, 2012). As an educational practice, it

has been criticized for being instrumental (and, thus, antithetical to the idea of philosophy), and for keeping it from allowing for experiences that disrupt the kind of instrumentality prevalent in educational institutions (e.g., Vansieleghem, 2012; Biesta, 2012; and Kohan, 2012). In the following, I will present this line of critique directed at the original P4C-approach, and look at what is being offered as an alternative (both in terms of conceptualizations and practices). In particular, I will look at how what is offered in terms of alternatives compares with the idea of philosophy based on in-fancy--arguing that one of the problems with such alternative approaches is that without dialogue as an essential feature of the practice, it is no longer recognizable as philosophical. I conclude that some of the basic procedural components of the P4C-model (especially a conversational component), should be preserved/retained, while, at the same time, re-conceptualizing the practice in non-doctrinal terms. My approach here is similar to that in the previous section: There, I showed that the theoretical foundations of the original P4C-approach could be re-conceived to make it compatible with the idea of Philosophy for In-fancy. Now, I will start from the opposite end of the spectrum, and show how conceptions of the practice that start with a non-directional experience, and are seemingly compatible with the idea in-fancy, can be shown to require the procedural framework of the P4C-original approach, to allow for the experience in-fancy. With regard to both the critique of the original P4C-approach, and alternative conceptions, I will examine and discuss the work of Vansieleghem (2012), Biesta (2012), and Kohan (2012).

5.3.1. Critical perspectives. The three authors I am considering here provide a range of critical perspectives on the original P4C-approach. While there are, as we have seen, different ways to interpret the theoretical underpinnings of the practice, it seems nevertheless important to closely examine critical views, not only to point to what could be seen as the shortcomings of a more directional approach, but to understand the motivation for the critique, and for the alternative models of the practice that are being proposed.

Vansieleghem (2012) acknowledges that the goal of traditional P4C is procedural, and not substantive, but argues that even advocating “merely” procedural rules is problematic, because they present a particular way of “getting access to the truth,” with the teacher having the knowledge needed to provide students with the skills (dialogical skills, in this case) to gain access to the truth. For Vansieleghem, the main problem with this approach is that rather than inviting the child “to look at, and to think about what presents itself,” it “shows the way to a deep truth, to what lies behind the things we see and think ... recalling the attitude of a search for a better world” (2012, p. 163). For her, the fact that the practice of “dialogical reasoning,” is privileged as “leading to an increasingly conscious use of deductive and inductive mental and methodological procedures” (ibid., p. 152), means that to *not* use those particular strategies, is to risk “not thinking and speaking for oneself” (ibid., p. 164). Vansieleghem sees the teacher as complicit in this, insofar as he or she confronts the child “with shortcomings and aporias in his thinking and acting” (ibid., p. 163), and, thus, instead of inviting the child to speak, “demands that she [the student] discover and recognize her shortcomings in relation to a

tribunal (a kingdom of truth)” (ibid.). For her, this also means that “the pupil experiences himself as not able to speak without a training of his mind by an expert” (ibid., p. 164), which she calls a “technologisation of philosophy and the child” (ibid.). She acknowledges that while P4C is itself cognizant of the need to reflect on its own foundations, it nevertheless “continues to imagine a form of life to which efficient dialogical practice might be sufficient” (ibid.)—pointing here to a tension both within the theoretical basis of P4C, and between the theory and the practice, discussed in the previous section.

Along very similar lines, Biesta’s critique of P4C is directed at what he sees as a type of instrumental pedagogy aimed to produce an individual with certain qualities and skills. He writes: “[T]he educational use of philosophy appears to be based on a particular idea—and perhaps we can say a particular truth—about what the human subject is and how the human subject can become ‘better’, for example as a more critical, reflective and reasonable thinker” (ibid., p. 149). He points out that the fact that the community of philosophical inquiry is modelled after the community of scientific inquiry, means that it “enacts a narrow representation of what philosophy can be about,” and it operates with a notion of science as a disinterested search for truth that is itself ideological” (ibid., p. 149). Again, not unlike Vansieleghem, he criticizes this view/application of philosophy because it is designed to develop in the students specific capacities, such as “cognitive and thinking skills, moral and social skills, and democratic skills” (ibid., p. 142). Biesta finds this both philosophically and educationally problematic. Philosophically, because it assumes “a particular truth about the human being” (ibid., p. 143), and educationally,

because it works with a pre-determined notion of what the outcome of education should be, rather than leaving it open what students will become. Like Vansieleghem, he also sees a tension between “what the community of philosophical enquiry is committed to [at the level of theory] and the assumptions that appear to inform its justification and pedagogy” (ibid.). And, he asks “whether we should think of education as a production of a pre-defined identity or whether education, if it has an interest in the human subject and its freedom, should always remain open to something else, something new” (ibid.). The reason he thinks that such an openness to something new is important, is that otherwise the child is not given an opportunity to “show who they are and who they will be,” which, for him, forfeits the opportunity for newcomers to “radically alter our understanding of what it means to be human” and which makes education about the “‘production’ of a particular kind of subjectivity” (ibid., p. 144).⁶⁹ Therefore, he believes that the key to a practice of philosophy with children is to move away from (disrupt, overcome) what he calls a form of “humanism,” that is, “the idea that it is possible to know and articulate the essence or nature of the human being” (ibid., p. 143).

Kohan’s critique of the traditional P4C-approach (2012), finally, points to what he sees as the doctrinal and utopian aspects of the practice, that is, the fact that “[p]hilosophical education, whether of the child or adult, and whether conducted through instruction or communal inquiry, is defended on the promise of its formative potential for a better world” (2012, p. 171). Importantly, he emphasizes that it is a particular

⁶⁹ In a similar vein, Vlieghe and Storme (2012) observe: “Of course it seems convenient, if not practically inevitable, to define philosophy (for/with) children as a set of practices, competences, methods, and skills that have a specific content and deliver specific goals”. Adding, that this also renders it “subservient to the existing regime, i.e. as [merely] an interesting addition to the set of competences provided by the existing curriculum” (Storme & Vlieghe, 2012, p. 26).

understanding of childhood that assumes the need to use education as a vehicle toward some specific goal (the formation of the child): [A]s long as there is a utopian agenda,” he writes, “any program for philosophy with children remains doctrinal in that it operates as an educational vehicle that carries a political component—the Form of the Good in Plato, democracy in Philosophy for Children—that is useful for the optimal formation of the citizens of the *pólis*” (ibid.).

To summarize, while these authors emphasize different aspects of what they see as the shortcomings of the original P4C-approach, they all criticize that the practice is based on some particular truth about the world: a universal notion of rationality, or a “kingdom of truth” (Vansieleghem), the “essence or nature of the human being” (Biesta), or a utopian idea of democracy as the goal of the formation of the child (Kohan). So with regard to their critique of the original P4C-approach, they share the basic philosophical commitments that underlie the practice of philosophy based on in-fancy. What I will examine in the next section, is whether the alternative conceptualizations they propose are also in line with the idea of the practice of philosophy with children based on the experience of in-fancy.

5.3.2. Alternative approaches. In my consideration of alternative approaches to doing philosophy with children, I begin with Vansieleghem (2012), given that she moves the furthest away from the original P4C-model, due to an emphasis on non-verbal features in practice. I will then consider Biesta’s alternative approach, who, while very similar in other regards, places more emphasis on language by introducing the idea of a “child-like position of not-knowing,” that “puts us ... in the position of the child as the

one whose seeing, thinking and doing is not yet ‘filled’ with the knowledge, categories and ways of speaking of others” (ibid.). Kohan, finally, comes maybe closest to the idea of in-fancy, with the difference that he emphasizes the experience of the other of language (i.e., *infancy*), rather than that of an indistinguishable mix of language and not language that characterizes the experience of in-fancy.

In “Philosophy with Children as an Exercise in Parrhesia: An Account of a Philosophical Experiment with Children in Cambodia” (2012), Vansieleghem describes an alternative way of thinking about, and doing philosophy with children. The experiment Vansieleghem refers to in her article, consisted in going for a walk with a group of children and then returning to the classroom where the children painted their portrait and reflected on their experience. Without going into too much detail about the specifics of the practice (also due to a lack of information about the nature of the dialogue), I want to focus here on the fact that there is clearly an emphasis on the activity (going for a walk, painting portraits), rather than the conversation. In other words, the walk and the painting of portraits seems to function less as a prompt or a stimulus for conversation, than as the heart of the practice. On first sight, this may seem very much in line with philosophy based on an experience of in-fancy, as it emphasizes the experience of the other of language (experimentation, activities, exercises), as a way to go beyond just language, and, thus, beyond established ways of speaking and thinking. So, when Vansieleghem describes the goal of the practice as a “preparation of the self, not in order to get access to another (more real) world (the world of dialogical reasoning, for instance), but in order to gain access to the reality of *this* world” (2012, p. 167). Instead of engaging in a practice

that “directs the child to the Promised Land,” what she believes is needed is “a practice that moves the child away from this idea” toward one “that allows oneself to act as things demand and to hold in suspense dominant regimes of power and thought” (ibid., p. 168), in “border places or practices” that make it possible “to experience and articulate what is happening here and now” (ibid.).⁷⁰

We can distinguish here both a critical component that consists in “suspend[ing] dominant regimes of power and thought” by allowing children to “speak outside the terms of abstract signification and the discourses of knowledge production” (p. 153?), and a positive component, consisting in the experience and articulation of “what is happening here and now.” The way she articulates what she sees as the positive aspect of the experience is indeed very similar to the experience of in-fancy. She writes, for example, that:

it is not self-actualisation that is at stake, but the affirmation that one can speak, think and see. The parrhesiast does not understand speaking, thinking or seeing as skills one has to acquire—say, through ‘learning by doing’—but as a work upon the self, with the experience of being able to say something more, while realizing and affirming what one is used to saying and thinking. ... The work upon the self that he performs is not regulated by knowledge, by competence or by (humanistic)_ideals, but by willingness to put the limits of one’s own experience to the test of one’s

⁷⁰ So we can see how this is quite similar to what I have described as an element of infancy in phenomenology, of allowing the phenomena to show themselves from themselves, and to articulate them with as much openness as possible in terms of their articulation (that is, language).

own thinking. This does not reveal underlying regularities or a stable foundation for thought. (ibid., p. 165)

This does indeed come very close to describing an experience of in-fancy, for example, when she speaks of an “affirmation that one can speak, think and see” and of “being able to say something more,” and a “willingness to put the limits of one’s experience to the test of one’s own thinking.” The difference is that the kind of experience she is eluding to is one that is not (or at least not primarily) one that involves language (i.e., it is not an *experimentum linguae*, as Agamben would say), but an *experimentum infantiae*, that is, literally, an experience of not speaking (a *mute* experience). For her, preparing for “the figure for which knowledge does not exist” is not primarily done by, in, or through language, but can only be accomplished through “exercises in the form of *askesis* and experiment” (ibid., p. 159). And when she speaks of the limits of experience, she seems to be pointing to an experience beyond language, rather than one on the threshold of language and not language, within the act of speaking, i.e., where the two are indistinguishable (as in the case of in-fancy). Assuming that this is a fair reading of her view of the practice, it makes perfect sense that she would place less emphasis on dialogue or conversation, and not see them as a necessary component for the realization of the limits of language within language (as is the case for the practice of philosophy based on in-fancy). Instead, she seems to see certain kinds of (non-linguistic) experiences as a way to disrupt established ways of speaking from “outside” of language, so to speak. So we might say, using her own formulation, that her emphasis is not on an “*articulation*

of what's happening here and now," but on an "articulation of *what's happening here and now*."

While this may seem like just a slight difference in emphasis, it is indeed crucial for how we conceive of philosophy with children, and the way it is practiced. While the activities she is describing may certainly help to disrupt knowledge based on language, and may also be considered in itself valuable, and maybe even educationally valuable (based on a broad understanding of education that includes practices and exercises that are not aimed at specific goals or outcomes), the question is whether these activities can still be considered *philosophical* activities (even based on a very broad understanding of philosophy). The reason this is problematic is that unless we can say what makes this practice (or the experience it allows for) philosophical, whatever value we assign to it, is not about the value of doing *philosophy* with children. For example, we can talk about the activity of painting a tree in philosophical terms, but describing an activity as philosophically significant, doesn't make the practice or activity itself philosophical. What would do so, it seems, is if the activity stimulated questions (e.g., Which is more real the tree I drew, or the tree itself that I used as a model? Do the different paintings of the tree differ in terms of how real they are?, etc.), which could then lead to a philosophical discussion.⁷¹ Using an activity like painting a portrait, or going for a walk,

⁷¹ To use one of many examples, Vansieleghem writes about the children's experience of painting their portraits: "The experience the children had was such that it seemed that it was not *they* that painted, expressing themselves, so much as the painting that expressed them. ... being attentive to what needs to be said and thought ... What was said through the portrait as embodied by the painter. No norm of this embodiment could be specified: it expressed itself primarily in what they did" (157-158).

and reflecting on that experience, means that virtually any kind of activity could be considered philosophical, or, an example of doing philosophy with children (if it is children that engage in the activity).

This doesn't mean that activities like the ones Vansieleghem proposes could not be used as a stimulus for philosophical dialogue, as long as the dialogue were more clearly defined in terms of what makes it philosophical. As mentioned above, the advantage of some kind of procedural framework, in this regard, is that it ensures that the question discussed is of a broadly philosophical nature, that there is some kind of intimation of (movement toward) truth. And, as long as the teacher does not play the role of moving the conversation—either in terms of content, or of procedural skills—toward more reasonableness, a practice based on in-fancy seems very much compatible with both Vansieleghem's philosophical commitments, and the basic premise underlying her practice.

For Biesta, the real, positive value of philosophy (both in general, and in education) consists in resisting any kind of instrumentalization. Philosophy should therefore allow for moments of exposure and interruption that lead to hesitation and experiences of not knowing. What he proposes, is a pedagogy that can overcome the instrumental tendencies of P4C and replace them with the kind of “post-humanist understanding of education” that “wants to see education as a concern for the ways in which individuals-in-their-uniqueness might come into the world” (ibid., p. 149). The concept of *exposure* is key here. Rather than an educational technique, for Biesta “exposure ... denotes a ‘quality’ of human interactions and engagement that may make

the event of the incoming of uniqueness possible” (ibid.). He further specifies the quality of exposure as “the moment when I am exposed in my singularity” (ibid.). As such, exposure is “not about the revelation of a unique, pre-existing identity; it is about the constitution of me as being irreplaceable in the face of an appeal, in the face of a call. Exposure does not produce; exposure only interrupts” (ibid.). Very similar in this regard to Vansieleghem, this is not about the production of a particular kind of subjectivity, but about a particular experience that is valuable (primarily in a critical sense) because it resists the generalizing power of language. As such, he sees philosophy as an activity that is “not focused on knowing and the improvement of knowledge, but has an orientation towards *not-knowing*” (ibid., p. 150). For Biesta, this way of doing philosophy is one that is natural to children in the sense that children are less conditioned to see things as general patterns (and, we could add, more used to seeing things—as if—for the first time). Philosophy, he writes, “puts us ... in the position of the child as the one whose seeing, thinking and doing is not yet ‘filled’ with the knowledge, categories and ways of speaking of others (ibid.). And he adds: “This child-like position of not-knowing that can follow from exposure may well suggest an entirely different set of possibilities for the educational engagement with philosophy and may well give the phrase ‘philosophy for children’ an entirely new meaning” (ibid.).

While both, Biesta’s critique and his vision for an alternative approach to philosophy with children, seem quite similar to that of Vansieleghem, they differ in certain ways that are important with regard to the relationship between his views and the practice of philosophy with children based on in-fancy. One difference is that, in contrast

to Vansieleghem, he places more emphasis on language. The other is that he operates with a notion of *singularity* (an idea of self) that does not consist in “the revelation of a unique, pre-existing identity,” and, thus, resembles the idea of in-fancy as allowing for a radical openness with regard to who we are. However, he gives only few indications of what the alternative “educational engagement with philosophy,” he evokes, may look like in practice. In particular, what seems to be needed here, is a better understanding of what a “child-like position of not-knowing” (Biesta, 2012, p. 150) consists in, what kind of practice of philosophy can bring it about, and what would make the experience of being in that position educational valuable. These questions are specifically addressed in Kohan’s conception of philosophy with children to which I now turn.

Kohan sees philosophy (and education) specifically from the perspective of the notions of the child and childhood, standing, in this regard, in a long tradition within P4C, reaching from Mathews (1980, 1994) to Kennedy (2006). What Kohan’s adaptation of Lyotard’s notion of *infantia*, in particular, does, is that it moves away from the idea of childhood as a developmental period (as the other of adult language and reasonableness) to an idea of childhood, conceived in non-developmental and impersonal terms, i.e., as a constitutive feature of human beings, in general, and one that is intimately tied to language. This makes it possible to think of the experience of childhood (or *infantia*) in philosophy with children in a way that is neither developmental, nor utopian. What makes Kohan’s model of philosophy for children, and his application of Lyotard’s notion of *infantia*, significant in this context, is that it bears a close resemblance to the idea of in-fancy, which allows for a further clarification of in-fancy, as defining feature of the

practice of philosophy with children, by pointing out both the similarities and differences between the two.

The reason Lyotard's notion of *infantia* is so important for Kohan, is that it allows us to conceive of education (and philosophy with children, in particular) as "not under the logic of the formation of childhood" (2012, p. 171), that is, as not being aimed at a particular goal, such as "the social and political education of childhood" (ibid.). The key to such a re-conceptualized understanding of childhood, for Kohan, is the concept of time. He distinguishes between chronological and non-chronological concepts of childhood, suggesting that rather than conceiving of time as "numbered moments (*chronos*)," "there is another dimension of living time more akin to a childlike form of being (*aion*), non-numbered" (ibid., p. 172). Childhood, for Kohan, "may be understood, not only as a period of life but as a specific strength, force or intensity that inhabits a qualitative life at any given chronologic time" (ibid.). For support of this understanding of childhood, Kohan draws from Deleuze, who thinks of childhood as impersonal, and non-subjective, and of "becoming-child," or "block of childhood" (ibid., p. 173), as well as from Lyotard, whose notion of *infantia* brings in the aspect of language. "For Lyotard," Kohan writes, "... childhood represents the difference between what can and what cannot be said—*infantia* (literally 'absence of speech') is for him the unsayable, or as he puts it, 'what is not said'" (ibid., p. 174). Like Deleuze's notion of childhood, childhood for Lyotard is not a stage of life that has to be overcome, rather it is something that "inhabits, imperceptibly, the sayable as its condition, its shadow, or remainder" (ibid.). One way of saying this is that he points to the other of language as what makes

language possible. As such it is not limited to children, but inhabits “the words of every human being” (ibid.). Reminiscent of Hampe’s notion of the aspect of unrepeatability in the experience of particulars, and his notion of first-timeness, Kohan quotes Lyotard as saying that childhood is ““the event of a possible and radical alteration in the flux that pushes things to repeat the same”” (ibid.). Given that, for both Deleuze and Lyotard, childhood is a constitutive feature of human life in general, Kohan concludes that, based on this understanding of childhood, education is not about the transformation of childhood into adulthood, but, rather, “might be what fosters, nurtures and cares for the experience of childhood itself” (ibid.).

For Kohan, the experience of philosophical thinking (whether with children, or adults) can be a way of experiencing childhood itself. He describes the practice as one that can create an opening to think differently from the ways we are used to think, or, as he puts it, “forced or manipulated into thinking by the dominant cultural forces of our time” (ibid., p. 175), leading students to question the kind of truths “in which they are already installed” (ibid., p. 176). For him, the practice is about an experience rather than truth, a process rather than a product, and it is based on sensitivity rather than rational discourse. In other words, for Kohan, the practice of philosophy should not just be thought of as an intellectual endeavor, but as a kind of “spiritual exercise,” and “a form of living which engages the whole of existence—a life-changing conversion” (ibid., p. 178). As such, it is about a pursuit of self-knowledge that involves transformation, instead of being about “practicing intellectual skills,” in order to “achieve epistemological certainty and existential security” (ibid., p. 179). This, for him, also means that it is a practice that

requires unlearning, insofar as “philosophical exercise does not ‘fill’ interlocutors with dogmas, assumptions and beliefs, nor even with interesting ideas, concepts or questions. Rather it ‘empties’ the interlocutors of unexamined ideas, dogmas, beliefs, questions and values” (ibid, p. 180). Similar to Vansieleghem and Biesta, then, Kohan emphasizes the critical aspect of the practice.

With regard to the positive value of the experience of becoming child (*infantia*), the teacher plays an important role, for Kohan, insofar as she needs to foster in herself and the students the experience of “becom[ing] a child” (ibid.). Given that Kohan sees children as privileged in this regard (due to a briefer exposure to oppressive institutions), and, therefore, as being “closer to a state in which they can really think for themselves,” (ibid.), Kohan believes that the teacher needs to put herself in a position of non-knowing. Kohan refers here to Socrates, as an example of “a pedagogical situation in which the student learns without a teacher” (ibid., p. 181), a situation where there is no necessary relationship between teaching and learning. He adds: “What Socrates helps us to question is the pedagogical dogma that what a student learns is in the teacher, and is somehow transmitted to, or made to appear, in the learner through a certain behavior or even a disposition of the teacher” (ibid.). This is interesting because it echoes the idea of the teacher as example or paradigm (Socrates, Nietzsche), but seems to radicalize this idea by emphasizing the complete lack of the effect of the teacher on the student, a kind of non-relationship.

In terms of practices that would make an experience of becoming child possible, Kohan suggests that the teacher should engage with children in “activities such as

painting, drawing and formulating questions as a child does them” (ibid., p. 180), which, for Kohan, “is not a matter of imitating a child or of behaving ‘childishly’, but of facing our own lives as children are used to doing—as if we were doing something for the first time, as if anything were possible” (ibid.).⁷² While this comes very close to the idea of the teacher as an example or paradigm of in-fancy, the difference is that *infantia* is conceived as the other of language rather than as both language and not language. So the question is whether it is enough for the teacher to be an example of becoming child, or *infantia* (the other of language) to allow for the *students’* experience of *infantia*, instead of just experiencing themselves as the particular children/*infantes* they are, which also means remaining stuck in “their” world, that is, the world of their particular upbringing (family, peers, popular culture). We may even wonder if the child is not actually disadvantaged with regard to the experience of *infantia*. If *infantia* is indeed present in the speech of anybody who uses language, adults can experience it as much as children. And while children may be seen as (developmentally) closer to not-speaking (and, thus, the other of language), they are—for the same reason--also further away from experiencing *infantia* (the other of language) *as* the other of language. In which case, it may not be sufficient for the teacher to be an example of “becoming child,” and instead may require that the children themselves experience the other of childhood (language, rationality) in order to experience *infantia*. Or, as is the case in a practice of philosophy based on in-fancy, to experience in-fancy as the zone of indistinction between language

⁷² It is interesting that Kohan uses here almost the exact same word as Hampe (*Erstmaligkeit*) and Agamben (*primavoltità*) to describe a defining feature of the value of doing philosophy, namely that it allows us to face our lives “as if we were doing something for the first time” (ibid.).

and not-language, to realize the limits of language (and rationality), that is, that there is always more than language.

With regard to the last point, I want to come back again to what Hampe says about the need to make assertions to experience the limited value of assertions. Referring to Socrates' claim that "I know that I don't know," he writes that "[a]s an assertion ... this phrase remains implausible" (2014, p. 95), adding that it is more like a "realization that happens when we engage in examining the assertions other people make, and that we ourselves make, in order to realize that there is no knowledge that we can use to orient our lives" (ibid.). But what this implies is that in order to realize the limitations of our knowledge (the lack of any kind of ultimate truth that could be used to guide our lives), we need to first engage in the kind of dialogue that intimates the existence of truth (rather than being simply the opposite of truth). Which also means that an in-fancy-based practice of philosophy with children needs the kind of procedures (e.g., asking philosophical questions, maintaining an intimation of truth) that allow for (and invite) the kind of dialogue that contains assertions and arguments to allow for the realization of the limitations/limited validity of assertions, in order to make the experience of in-fancy (or *infantia*, for that matter), possible.

5.4. Non-directional Approaches Using a Procedural Framework

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of number of authors from German-speaking countries (Martens, 2008, 2012; Weber, 2008; Marsal et al, 2009; Marsal, 2011) that are particularly interesting in the context of this investigation, because they combine a commitment to a thoroughly non-instrumental conception of philosophy with children

(in line with the authors discussed in the previous section) with certain procedural recommendations (method/pedagogy) for the educational practice (similar to those used in the original P4C-approach) that I have described as necessary for the experience of in-fancy.

Ekkehard Martens (2012), for example, states explicitly that philosophy with children should not be thought of as being aimed at any particular outcomes. He writes: “The goal of [the practice of] philosophy ..., including in schools, is its purposelessness (*Zweckfreiheit*)” (2012, p. 103). At the same time, he shows how this principle of the practice is compatible with, and can be translated into certain didactic methods. Interestingly—and maybe not surprisingly—the methods he recommends are derived from various philosophical traditions. The underlying idea here could be said to be that philosophy with children can use a variety of methods and techniques, as long as it contains, as its defining feature, and as the common denominator, the purposeless experience of in-fancy. Martens refers to the following “didactic methods,” and their role/significance for the practice:

1. Phenomenological method: to describe in a differentiated and comprehensive way what I perceive and observe;
2. Hermeneutic method: making one’s own pre-existing understanding explicit, reading (not only philosophical) texts.
3. Analytic method: highlighting and examining central concepts and arguments;
4. Dialectic method: realizing an (oral, and written) offer for dialogue, identifying [*zuspitzen auf*] and weighing alternatives and dilemmas;
5. Speculative method: allowing for

imaginations [*Phantasien*] and new ideas, testing and exploring possible solutions, and thought experiments. (Martens, 2012, pp. 103-104)

What makes these suggestions for the practice of philosophy so interesting is that it seems to acknowledge the experience of in-fancy as the defining feature of the practice, and, thus, as the common denominator in different approaches to the practice. For Martens these different “didactic methods” are facets of, and are derived from, a more basic dimension of everyday practices. “[T]he methods and schools within academic philosophy,” he writes, “have developed out of a pre-existing, everyday practice of speaking and thinking” (ibid., p. 103). In other words, the experience of in-fancy is something that is always present (as a constitutive aspect of being human, and, more specifically, of beings that have language), but is realized to varying degrees. Philosophy could be said to be the practice that realizes this constitutive feature of our humanity most fully. This is also the reason why we don’t have to settle for a specific philosophical approach for doing philosophy with children that all practioners need to follow, as long as there is a general commitment to in-fancy as the defining feature of the practice. In fact, as Murris (2008) has suggested, a continuous reflection on the practice and its value among practitioners could be regarded as one of its characteristic features. In meta-dialogues among P4C teachers on how to do P4C, she writes, “it is the reflective activity of such philosophical engagement itself, not the instrumental desire for the one right answer that should be their guide” (ibid., p. 271).

With regard to the specifics of the practice itself, Martens emphasizes the need for an experimentation with concepts language (including argumentation, observation, etc.)

as what allows for an experience of both the possibilities and the limitations of language. For this reason, he regards “concept formation” as one of the critically important pillars of philosophizing with children. In philosophical terms, his view is based on an idea of referentiality, in which the relationship between sign and signified is not ontologically based, but is formed in a process aimed at consensus. As Martens points out, already Plato discussed this “linguistic-philosophical position” on the status of concepts in his dialogue *Kratylos*,⁷³ expressing what I have been referring to as the contingency of language.

The experimentation with concepts, is also what Barbara Brünig (1984) focuses on, speaking of the “expansion of the conceptual repertoire” through a “cooperative process of reflection” on concepts like life and death, idea and thing, or thinking and dreaming, “which go beyond the realm of what is concrete to the senses.” And she continues: “We try to discover the characteristics summarized in these concepts and use them to develop our ability to imagine” (Brünig, 1984, p. 24; cited in Marsal, 2011, p.24).

In the following, I want to look at the work of Eva Marsal (2011), whose conceptualization of the practice comes closest, among existing conceptions, to articulating the idea of in-fancy in philosophy with children. Like Martens, she believes that the practice should not be aimed at specific outcomes, such as the improvement of thinking skills, while seeing dialogue, aimed at truth, as a necessary component. Very

⁷³ As has already been pointed out, there the protagonist Hermagones addresses the issue in this way: “for any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as correct as the old [...] for there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users.” (Plato, 2009a, 383a-384d)

much in line with Socratic and Nietzschean conceptions of the practice of philosophy previously discussed, Marsal sees the practice of philosophy as consisting in an “indispensable struggle for the concept” (Marsal, 2011, p. 24). “[C]ooperative reflection on concept formation,” she writes, allows children to both, “find their bearings within the culture,” and to “infuse new life into old concept schemata through a reflective approach, developing new ways of seeing that introduce new concepts and thus expand their repertoires of thought and action” (ibid., p. 25). For her, the practice is beneficial in three ways, one of which is mainly critical/negative, the other two positive. Firstly, while the realization of the contingency of language (made possible by a reflection on concept formation) allows for a critique of language used for a “metaphysical objectification of reality,” the conversation itself also leads to habits of reflexive competence in individuals and the establishment of rules that govern society, and, thus, ultimately serve to protect the individual. In terms of the positive effects of the practice, Marsal points out that it allows for individuation and free self-development, and, for a certain kind of community, and communal well-being. Showing the relationship between her characterization of the practice and some of the facets of the experience of in-fancy, will allow for a better understanding of the specific role of in-infancy in the practice of philosophy with children—setting the stage for a fuller discussion of the practice of philosophy for in-fancy at the classroom level, in the following chapter.

5.4.1. Contingency of language, and the negative value of concept formation.

As discussed in chapter 3, for Nietzsche truth is based on language, and language is purely based on convention. Marsal writes that “Nietzsche’s global statement that there is

no truth can be interpreted as a warning against the metaphysical objectification of reality” (2011, p. 29). What, for her, makes engaging in philosophical dialogue beneficial, is exactly this ability to experience and realize that there is no ultimate truth: “For truth-seekers who know that there is no discernable truth outside themselves, acknowledging this insight leads to an attitude of mutual respect, since no one can claim to own the truth” (ibid.) Put differently, we could say that when children engage in seeking answers to open-ended, and, ultimately, unanswerable questions, they realize/experience that there doesn’t already exist a fixed or true meaning, and, thus, that there is no particular way in which we have to speak. The value of this attitude, for Marsal, is mostly critical, given that “[o]nly reflection on the concepts and their associated metaphors has the potential to disrupt their manipulative power”. And she adds: “This is why the act of *concept formation* determines the methodological trajectory of *Philosophizing with Children* and is characterized by Martens as “liberation from the ‘violence’ of fixed ideas, and as mental work” (Martens, 1999, p. 106, Marsal, p. 32).⁷⁴

But there is also a positive (not only critical) aspect to this practice. Drawing here mostly from Nietzsche, her view of the practice can be summarized in the following way: The use of language and reason is not useless, because we can see the drive toward a clarification of concepts as a “service to life,” in spite of the lack of an ultimate truth, because it leads to “the habituation to habits of reflective competence,” which is something that is “useful throughout life and into advanced age” (ibid., p. 33). And at a

⁷⁴ She refers here specifically to discussions with children and young people, about moral and political concepts such as “social justice,” “evil,” or the “permissibility to kill animals.”

communal level, concept formation is about the development of a common language, and the laying down of binding concepts. The binding nature of these concepts may be an illusion, but is the key for “moral accomplishments.” The concept of freedom, for example, creates in humans the “illusion that they are free” (ibid., p. 29). And:

People search for meaning; they give themselves laws and act in accordance with them, whereby they become self-aware individuals and take responsibility for themselves. Without this self-deception they would be held back on an animalistic level of existence. (ibid., pp. 29-30)

This “process of becoming human,” for Marsal, “is not possible without engaging in the formation of concepts” (ibid., p. 30). But in addition to deceiving us about the non-contingent nature of language and truth that makes us engage in a process of concept formation, for Marsal, it also “function[s] to make a common construction process possible” (ibid., p. 30). In other words, it also provides us with the tools that can guide us in agreeing about how to use language, and what to count as truth. This, according to Marsal, is equally valuable for life, because we are ultimately better off if we organize our lives in that way, instead of living in a Hobbesian “state of nature”. Engaging in a communal formation of concepts, then, allows for both, a realization of the contingency of language and truth (freeing us from the tyranny of established ways of speaking, thinking, and acting), while at the same time realizing the value of engaging in a collective way of coming up with the best way to organize our lives together.

5.4.2. Value of concept formation for individuation and self-development. On the one hand, then, Marsal sees the value of engaging in a communal reflection on the

formation of concepts in making us aware of the lack of ultimate truths, while also allowing us to organize life in a way that ultimately aims at protecting the individual. In addition to protecting the individual (self-preservation), however, she also sees it in positive terms, as creating the conditions for individuation and self-development. Drawing here mostly from Nietzsche, she sees free self-development, that is, the ability to transcend the conventions of language (and, thus, thinking and acting) as a key to individual well-being. As is the case for Nietzsche, for her, the function of (the illusion of) truth, is that it “leads to exceeding the limits of the self”, and to “finding one’s own goals and daring to go beyond one’s own boundaries” (ibid., p. 35), making possible “the positive sensation of one’s own vitality,” as an expression of the “productive powers with which individuals make themselves into persons and create corresponding forms of life” (ibid.).⁷⁵

While Marsal emphasizes the need for free development, self-transcendence, self-mastery, and control of one’s life for adults, when it comes to doing philosophy with children, her emphasis moves away from those goals, and towards free play as a goal in itself. So instead of describing the conversation in philosophy with children as actively promoting self-development, and self-transcendence, her description of the practice is

⁷⁵ “Nietzsche’s predominant thought ... is that the free spirit, though of necessity intellectual, can only become alive and aesthetic in alliance with its sensuality. Only in sensuality, in the “sense of the earth,” does all creation have a cosmic, geological, and biological function. ... We can only unlock our intellect in a really productive way if we find our way back to our physical being, through which we can grasp ourselves as elements of life” (xx). For Marsal, this makes Nietzsche into an enlightener with the goal “to expand the radius of reason through insight into its historical, spiritual and physical conditions, thereby putting it in service to life” (xx).

much less directional, and, thus, comes very close to the way I have described the experience of in-fancy in the practice of philosophy. She write, for example,

Children, of course, are not able to develop their own laws in ‘solitude’ and ‘self-discipline’—they are even more dependent on other people and their acceptance than adults. But philosophizing with others who approach them and their thoughts attentively and with respect provides them with a protective framework, with the underlying thought of making it possible for them to develop their own values independently, not allowing them be dictated, unexamined, by whatever conventions happen to be dominant in any particular time or place. (ibid., p. 36)

So here we have the idea of a “protective framework” that allows for a context in which children can develop their ideas independently, without being dictated by conventions/established ways of speaking. She refers here specifically to Nietzsche’s concept of the “‘playing’ child (metaphor for the highest transformation of the spirit) who, ‘in world shaping power’ ‘playfully moves stones back and forth, and builds up sand piles and again demolishes them’” (ibid., p. 36). For her, this figure of the playing child, points to the “philosophizing child,” who engages in the “primal game” of “metaphorically practicing an eternal ‘construction and destruction of the individual world’” (ibid., p. 36), that, as a metaphor for playing with concepts, can be “appropriated for the practice of philosophizing with children” (ibid., p. 37).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ She points here to examples of the practice that involve an “integration of the physical” (e.g., a project initiative Children Philosophize at the University of Regensburg and Munich in 2005 (Zeitler & Weber, 2006, pp. 89-94), where art “experienced with the senses” and “games involving the senses” were used as a

5.4.3. Forming a particular kind of community. Finally, Marsal mentions another important aspect of the practice that corresponds to the communal facet of the experience of in-fancy, as something that is inherently pleasurable, and thus worth engaging in for its own sake. For children engaged in philosophy, she writes, the “‘breaking apart’ or ‘negation’ of the ‘old,’ ‘constrained’ world contains an element of pleasure” (ibid., p. 37). She is quoting here extensively from Martens who describes as the source for such pleasure the enthusiasm that comes with “the free movement of the mind, observing that, “[i]n philosophizing,

the children can say whatever they think, pursue ideas together, try out new ways of looking at things without prejudice, anxiety, or embarrassment, and they can spin out the threads of their thoughts. While philosophizing, the only authority they are subjected to is their own insight. No one controls them or instructs them which direction they must take. And so their pleasure in philosophizing is the experience of themselves as persons who can evolve in freedom. (Marsal, 2011, p. 38, from Martens, 2006)

And in addition to the experience of complete freedom, there is also the experience of “the recognition and living out of truth” (ibid.). What Martens means by this, is that there is not only an experience of “unbounded curiosity and imagination” (ibid.), but also “the experience of ... freedom to use reason in orienting oneself according to whatever one

“link between philosophy and the children’s life world” (37). Importantly, she refers to such activities as a “stimulus for philosophizing,” not as the practice of philosophy itself (cf. Vansieleghem).

determines to be true or real” (ibid.). It is for that reason that when engaging in philosophy,

we experience ourselves as reasonable beings in our capacity to be astonished and observe situations and objects more precisely, understanding things *as* what they are from various viewpoints, clarifying concepts, arguing with others about tenable and less tenable reasons, and coming up with new, seemingly fantastic ways of seeing things. (ibid.)

For Marsal, this is what makes the process not merely an “Apollonian act,” but also a “Socratic act” (ibid., p. 39). “In the community of inquiry,” she writes, “the Socratic and Dionysian do not separate, but merge with each other” (ibid.). What makes it so, is that in addition to the “playful construction and destruction of the individual world as an emanation of primal desire,” there is also the communal dimension of “crossing of borders from the individual world toward the world of humanity, or in other words, toward the ‘collective individual’ ... who ‘gives precedence’ to the common good before the personal. (ibid., p. 39). For Marsal and Martens, this also means that what becomes possible here, is what Marsal calls the “universalization of ethical concepts,” which, according to Martens, also means that “universal values such as human rights are not just arbitrary postulates, but are based on laboriously achieved insights into what is good for us all and for our lives together” (Marsal, ibid., 39, from: Martens, 2006. pp. 22-23).

In terms of the presence of the idea of in-fancy, we can say that, for Marsal, and for Martens, there are three aspects of the practice of philosophy with children that align with the idea of in-fancy: the realization of the conventionality of language (which

corresponds to the experience of the contingency of language in in-fancy). Then there is the individual experience of a “free movement of the mind” that is experienced as itself as pleasurable (experience of in-fancy), and there is the communal dimension of being engaged with other human beings in a communal process of concept formation and the kind of community this allows for (corresponding to the communal facet of the experience of in-fancy). Finally, in line with what has been said about the need for procedural structures, dialogue is regarded as crucial for the practice, because it allows for “the experience of ... freedom to use reason in orienting oneself according to whatever one determines to be true or real” (see above).

There are clearly directional/developmental elements in her understanding of the role of philosophy with children, for example, when Marsal refers to “Nietzsche’s epistemological approach,” as one that is “marked by the striving to put forward a philosophical theory dedicated to personal expansion and development,” and that this allows us to “reconstruct philosophizing with children,” as an opportunity for the individual to “transcend the self in two directions: first in further development with regard to the ego and the self, and second in further development with regard to the “you” and the “we,” and as a practice “through which children and future adults can develop into ‘sovereign’ persons” (ibid., p. 40). But there are also clearly elements of in-fancy, as mentioned before, such as the idea of the contingency of language, and her description of the inherently pleasurable nature of the process of the free play of ideas, and the kind of communality that is made possible by the practice.

5.5. Summary

What I hope to have accomplished in this chapter, is to show to what extent the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy can also be located in current approaches to doing philosophy with children. I argued that at least some aspects of the theory of the original P4C-approach are compatible with this idea, while other aspects (and in particular those that are operable in the actual practice) are not. I then looked at critiques of the original P4C-approach and at what kind of alternative conceptions of the practice have been proposed. I pointed out how moving away from dialogue (and the use of language, more generally) risks making the practice no longer recognizable as philosophical. Finally, I considered approaches that are inherently non-directional, while also containing a procedural and methodological framework that makes the practice compatible with a conception of the practice based on in-fancy. However, because they lack the idea of philosophy with children as a weakly-utopian practice, they are unable to fully articulate in what sense the experience of in-fancy by itself, could be conceived as educationally valuable, without referring to certain developmental goals.

Chapter 6: Philosophy for In-fancy in the Classroom

6.1. Introduction

I started this investigation with an account of my own experience with doing philosophy in a formal education setting, recounting, how I ended up moving toward less and less facilitation due to the kind of experience this made possible. Agamben's idea of potentiality offered a first step towards articulating how such a practice that lacked the kind of directionality commonly associated with educational practices, might indeed be thought of as educationally valuable (chapter 1). I then presented Agamben's notion of the practice of philosophy as based on the experience of in-fancy, and went on to locate in-fancy in prominent conceptions of philosophy—establishing it as a defining feature of the practice of philosophy (chapter 2). Next, I showed how the idea of in-fancy (and Lewis' notion of *study* as a weakly-utopian practice, in particular) allows us to articulate a basic assumption in (especially progressive) education that education should be based on experience (chapter 3). In the previous chapter, finally, I showed how existing conceptualizations of the practice of philosophy with children contain, or are at least compatible with, the idea of in-fancy as a defining feature—with the ones that come closest to the idea of philosophy with children as based on in-fancy being those that reject specific outcomes, while, at the same time, seeing dialogue and concept formation directed at truth as a constitutive feature of the practice. In this chapter, I will present a conceptualization of philosophy with children, based on infancy (Philosophy for In-fancy), at the classroom level.

I will draw here again from Agamben's work, this time from his work in political philosophy, to articulate, in more detail, the dynamics and relationships in the P4I-classroom. In particular, I will look at how the experience of in-fancy is made possible by the silence of the voice of the teacher, who, within the larger educational context of the school, plays the role of what I will call "the teacher-as-not-teacher." Next, I take a closer look at the kind of speech in the conversation-component of the P4I-classroom, and how the silence of the voice the teacher leads to not just the opposite of sacred language (that is, blasphemy), but what Agamben refers to as profane speech. I will then look at the ultimate value of the experience made possible in P4I, as that of the realization of a certain state of well-being (*ease*)—at both an individual, and a communal level. This distinction is somewhat problematic, given that the experience itself is of course always individual. However, we can distinguish between a kind of well-being that is experienced by an individual in relation to the world, in general (even in the presence of others), and one that is made possible specifically through interacting and communicating with other people. In both cases, the kind of well-being made possible in P4I is not the actualization of some external goal. Rather, it is a fuller realization of something that is already there as an originary possibility due to the fact that we are beings that have language.

To mark the difference between the experience of in-fancy as an outcome, and as a realization of something given, I replace the term value (that I have been using so far to refer to why we should engage in the practice of philosophy with children) with that of the Agambenian notion of *use*. This will allow me to capture more clearly the status of the practice, and the experience it makes possible, as one that is neither directed at

specific outcomes (in the sense of being valuable for something), without therefor being simply valueless, situating it on the margin between the two. I am building here mostly on my discussion of in-fancy in conceptions of philosophy, education, and philosophy with children in the previous chapters of this investigation, to more fully develop the idea of philosophy with children based on in-fancy, at the classroom level, and to show why the particular form of life it represents should be made available to students in an educational setting, as one type of practice, and one possible form of life, among others.

6.2. Teacher-as-not-Teacher

I will continue here where I left off at the end of the second chapter. There, I reflected on how the lack of facilitation in my practice led to a certain kind of experience, and how Agamben's concept of im-potentiality allowed me to articulate the educational value of this part of my practice. I then identified in-fancy (the im-potentiality of language), as the defining feature of Agamben's conception of the practice of philosophy, and in the practice of philosophy, in general. What I will do in this chapter, is to again draw from the work of Agamben, to bring into clearer focus, the effect of the silence of the teacher in the conversation-component of the practice on the relationship between teacher and students, and the relationship of the students to each other.

It is important to point out here, that the lack of facilitation mainly applied to the conversation-component of my practice, whereas I retained other procedural elements of the original P4C-approach that involved a certain amount of facilitation, such as the use of prompts to generate questions, establishing procedural rules, and having students reflect on the practice at the end of a session (see also chapter 2). So while the dialogue

itself may resemble doing philosophy “in the wild,” that is, as a non-directional activity with peers, it is significant to acknowledge the relevance of this is happening in an educational setting to allow for the experience of in-fancy. In other words, not only are the procedural structures and rules operable in a formal education setting not a hindrance, they in fact play a crucial role in realizing the particular kind of experience (in-fancy), and the kind of speech (profane speech) that is characteristic for the P4I-classroom community. More specifically, I will show how the role of the teacher as a representative of the school (and the logic of education) consists in *intentionally* creating a space, in which an in-tentional community becomes possible (using her power to suspend it). The fact that the teacher remains present throughout the practice (as “teacher-as-not-teacher,” a paradigm of in-fancy), means that the conversation that forms the heart of the practice does not turn into mere play. It is the particular kind of experience that the role of the teacher-as-not-teacher in an educational setting makes possible, that makes this practice both valuable and appropriate in a formal educational setting.⁷⁷

To better understand the complex role of the teacher in P4I as the one who is using her power to implement the practice by establishing and enforcing procedural rules (“teacher-as-teacher”), to then suspend that power to allow for a practice that requires the silence of the teacher’s voice (“teacher-as-not-teacher”), I will draw from Agamben’s work on the relationship between power and language (*The Sacrament of Language: An*

⁷⁷ This is also the case with philosophy “in the wild,” but to a lesser, and more indirect extent, because here the sovereign is represented by established ways of speaking (Heidegger’s “das Man”), that is, social conventions, political institutions, cultural beliefs, etc., and, thus, less visible.

Archeology of the Oath, 2011), and on the role of the ban, and the sovereign decision in the maintenance, and overcoming of power (*Homo Sacer*, 1998).

In *The Sacrament of Language* (2011), Agamben states that the oath is “the historical testimony of the experience of language in which man was constituted as a speaking being” (2011, p. 66). He looks at the role of the oath, because the oath can be seen as a “sacrament of power” that goes back to (and still contains) a more originary function, namely that of guaranteeing the truthfulness of language (“sacrament of language”). Simply stated, before the advent of either religious ritual or political institutions, the oath was a linguistic utterance that “confirm[ed] and guarantee[d]” (Agamben, 2011. p. 3) the order of things. Drawing on linguist Benveniste’s work on the oath, Agamben further defines its function as that which supports, guarantees, and demonstrates. The oath “I pledge” for instance is a way of “guaranteeing the truth and efficacy of language” (ibid, p. 4). In other words, the oath guarantees the connection between words and actions, language and world, that is, meaning. This is not something that happened in the past, but (due to Agamben’s non-chronological understanding of origins), is internal to the present, insofar as the phylo-, and ontogenetic transition from human as a not-speaking to a speaking being is happening (is repeated, continues) in every speech act. As such, it “is not in fact an event that can be considered completed once and for all; it is always under way, because *Homo Sapiens* never stops becoming man” (ibid., p. 11). So, while the oath could be said to be present in every speech act, the way the oath is renewed, and kept operable (its operability enforced), is through institutions—be it courts (law), church, political institutions, or the institution of the

school, where the judge, the priest, or the teacher (respectively) administer the oath, by claiming authority with regard to what they are saying (“What I say is the truth”).⁷⁸

One way of describing how the practice of philosophy can make the oath (as an instrument of power) inoperable, is to say that it lifts the ban imposed by the law of education (that assumes a necessary relationship between words and things) on not-teaching and not-learning. This is similar to Illich and Masschelein & Simons, who also describe the teaching-process in terms of theological, legal, and economic practices. Illich, for example, described the role of the teacher as a ritual performance designed to perpetuate the addiction to compulsive teaching and thus passive submission to an external authority—the teacher. And Masschelein and Simons speak of schooling as baptism. Both are arguing for the need to suspend the role of the teacher in order for new forms of educational life to be possible. So one way of looking at the silence of the teacher is to think of it as an interruption of what Agamben refers to as the sovereign decision that constitutes all forms of power/sovereignty.

The “sovereign decision” refers to the power of the sovereign to declare a state of exception (to suspend the law)—which places him both inside and outside of the law. Corresponding to the marginal figure of the sovereign (on the other end of the equation of power) is what he calls “bare life.” “Bare life” (represented by the figure of *Home Sacer*) is equally marginal, in that it stands for whatever it is that is included in the law as that which needs to be excluded. “[S]overeignty,” Agamben writes, “... is the originary

⁷⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of the oath in relation to the relationship between language and power, and its relevance for education, see also Jasinski, I., and Lewis, T. E. (2017).

structure in which law refers to life and includes it in itself by suspending it.” (1998, p. 28) Agamben refers to this as “a relation of ban.” (ibid., p. 28) “Bare life,” that which is excluded, banned from the law, is intrinsically tied/related to sovereignty, because it is what makes it possible. He writes: “The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, *homo sacer* and the sovereign.” (ibid., p. 110) The question is: How can the relation of ban at the heart of sovereignty be overcome? Agamben’s response: “A critique of the ban will ... necessarily have to put the very form of relation into question, and to ask if the political fact is not perhaps thinkable beyond relation and, thus, no longer in the form of a connection” (ibid., p. 29) In other words, the only way to overcome the ban at the heart of the sovereign decision is to suspend the relation (between bare life and power) altogether, that is, to think “ontology and politics beyond every figure of relation, beyond even the limit relation that is the sovereign ban” (ibid., p. 47)

Applied to the relationship between teacher and students in education, we could say that not-teaching, and, thus, not-learning, is excluded, banned, but at the same time included (by its exclusion) as that which defines what should be happening in the classroom, namely teaching, and, thus, learning (“You must not not-teach/not-learn!”). What is excluded in the case of education is the student’s im-potentiality to not-learn (to choose to not actualize her ability to learn, to not realize her potential). In the conversation in P4C, the teacher, on the other hand, realizes his or her im-potentiality by falling silent, which suspends teaching, which, in turn, leads to a suspension of learning (the logic of education implies that if there is no teaching, there is no learning), which, in

turn, allows the students to realize their im-potentiality to learn (i.e. to not-learn). With this double/mutual suspension, what is being enacted in P4C is an inoperative, non-relational kind of relationship, a not-not relationship. By withdrawing all relationships to learning and teaching, the sovereign decision is being interrupted.

But this move in itself is problematic because what we want is not simply the ineffable or non-sensical opposite of some kind of prescriptive/established speech (whatever that would be), but the experience of the potentiality of language, within language.⁷⁹ So, for Agamben, the problem is not simply about getting rid of the sacrament of language (to lift the ban) entirely, because this would lead to words becoming vain/meaningless (and learning, mere play). In other words, while Agamben believes that in the juridical, religious, political realms, the oath (“sacrament of language” underlying the “sacrament of power”) needs to be made inoperable to free language from its sacred use in the oath, to make it available for new and different use, it is not simply about destroying or doing away with the operability of the oath, which would turn speech into its opposite, blasphemy—which is something he sees as equally problematic.

To understand how Agamben believes that it is possible to suspend the sacrament of language, without destroying it completely, and how this is also something that happens in P4I, we need to look at Agamben’s description of the role of the curse in the

⁷⁹ With philosophy done in the wild, this is not so much of a problem, because established ways of speaking have a powerful hold on us and can (according to Heidegger) never completely neutralized or replaced, so all that philosophy and the experience of infancy can do is to loosen that hold that established ways of language (Heidegger’s idle talk, or *Gerede*—that which has already been said) have on us. To a certain extent, the same is true in the classroom, but the problem is that if we just let students talk, we may just get *Gerede* (this is Biesta’s and Masschelein & Simons’ concern), so we want to establish the conditions for the possibility of more than *Gerede*, which is accomplished in P4I through of the experience of the contingency of language within the context of reasonable, or at last meaningful, speech, that contains an intimation of truth—as a precondition for the experience of the limits of reasonable speech and objective truth.

oath. The way the oath assures that the sacrament of language is kept in place, is through its relationship with the curse (as Agamben points out, *sacratio* can mean curse; *sacramentum* is one of the Latin terms for oath; in Greek, *ara* can mean curse or prayer). According to Agamben, the oath has been seen as a “conditional curse,” insofar as “[t]o swear is first of all ... to curse oneself in the event that one says what is false or does not do what has been promised” (2011, p. 30). In other words, the oath cannot be separated from its opposite, the curse. For instance, in ancient oaths, there is often expressed both a good omen and a bad omen so that the curse follows a blessing or vice versa. As an example, Agamben cites the following:

To those who swear loyally and remain faithful to their own, may children give them joy, may the earth grant its products in abundance, may their herds be fruitful, and may they be filled with other blessings, them and their children; but to perjurers may the earth not be productive nor their herds fruitful; may they perish terribly, them and their stock! (ibid, p. 31)

In this case, the blessing and the curse arrive together as co-originary possibilities within the oath. With regard to language, this means that by pledging to speak truthfully, one accepts the sacrament of language, which is really the sacrament of power, and one curses oneself should one commit perjury (that is, speak as if there were no necessary connection between words and things, a state of infancy/potentiality of language). By getting rid of the sacrament of language all together, however, we get blasphemy, which

is the symmetrical other to the sacred use of language in the oath.⁸⁰ In general terms, this means that rather than an experience of language that contains both truth *and* error, blessing *and* curse, without the oath, language becomes all error, and cursing.

So, the point is that we neither want language that is based on the sacrament of power, nor do we want the opposite, a power that can use blasphemous language (language that has lost any sanctity), but we want language that retains an intimation of the sacred (truth/necessary connection of words and things) and the possibility of lying. So it is not about going back to a state before language, but to a state of the formation (the infancy) of language—the very state that made human language possible, the state when a living being “found itself co-originarily exposed to the possibility of both truth and lie, committed itself to respond with its life for its words, to testify in the first person for them” (2011, p. 69). In other words, the oath is also necessary for human beings, so that the human being (the “speaking animal”) can “put its nature at stake in language and to bind together in an ethical and political connection words, things, and actions,” which alone, for Agamben, makes it “possible for something like a history, distinct from nature and, nevertheless, inseparably intertwined with it, to be produced” (ibid.).

As we have already seen, for Agamben, the means to do so are found in (the practice of) philosophy. At its heart, philosophy, according to Agamben, is precisely that which pronounces “yes” to language without abiding in either truth or error, the sacred or

⁸⁰ Whereas in the oath, the name of God guarantees the connection between words and actions (“In the name of God, I swear that I will...”), in the act of blasphemy the efficacy of the name is rendered inoperative, separating words from deeds/things. Summarizing, Agamben writes, “The name of God, released from the signifying connection, becomes blasphemy, vain and meaningless speech, which precisely through this divorce from meaning becomes available for improper and evil uses” (2011, p. 43).

the blasphemous. “Philosophy,” Agamben summarizes, “is constitutively a critique of the oath: that is, it puts in question the sacramental bond that links the human being to language, without for that reason simply speaking haphazardly, falling into the vanity of speech” (2011, p. 72).

Applying Agamben’s work on the oath in Sacrament of Language to P4I, we can see how there are really two stages to the practice of P4I that allow for the particular kind of experience/speech in P4I: The first one consists in setting up the procedures in P4I as a way to put the oath in place (re-enforce it), while the oath can then, in a second stage, be suspended during the conversation part of the practice. So it is the first stage (the educational context) that guarantees that what happens in the conversation is not simply that the sovereign decision is made inoperable (due to the silence of the voice of the teacher), but that the conversation is about the experience of infancy as the threshold of not-language and language, nature and culture, blasphemous and sacred speech. The way it does this, is through first suspending the suspension of the oath, that is, of re-instating the oath through the establishment of procedural rules (e.g., “We show respect for each other”; “We listen carefully to each other”; “We help each other express our ideas”; “Each person’s views are taken seriously”; and so forth.) using here the sacrament of power and language (that words mean something, that promises have to be kept). To then suspend the oath by silencing the voice of the teacher which leads to a suspension of the sacrament of power, and, thus, the sacrament of language that underlies the sacrament of power (enacting the sacrament of language without the oath), without therefore merely reinforcing the general inoperativeness of the oath that leaves us with only blasphemy. In

other words, the silence of the teacher in the conversation is the voice of the teacher without the curse.

To fully understand how this is happening/possible, we have to keep in mind that, in traditional schooling, it is not (or at least not primarily) the teacher who is *taking* the oath. Rather, he or she is *administering* (officiating/presiding over) the oath by speaking in the voice of the teacher and expecting the students to do the same (“Repeat after me: ...”). It is the students who actually *take* the oath (receive the sacrament/baptism of learning) by “repeating after the teacher,” that is, by speaking in the voice of the teacher (i.e., the voice of reasonableness and truth). But because, as we have seen, every oath contains an acceptance of the consequences should one fail to fulfill the pledge, the students are actually cursing *themselves* as they are performing the oath. And, we may add that whenever the teacher is speaking in the voice of the teacher, declaring, as it were, “Repeat after me: ‘I speak the truth’”), she could be said to also be taking, or rather renewing (and simultaneously fulfilling), the oath. But this also means that, by falling silent, that is, by refusing to take (renew) the oath, the teacher is suspending the oath for herself, which makes her an example of the inoperability of the oath (that the oath can be suspended without consequences), without therefore using language in vain, that is, without becoming blasphemous. In other words, the teacher becomes an example of the inoperability of the oath without the curse. At the same time, she is freeing the students from taking the oath themselves with impunity (“If it’s ok for me do this, it is ok for you as well”). But, given that the teacher, as the one who has (re-)affirmed the oath in the first stage (making the students pledge to adhere to the procedural rules) is the same person,

the very presence of the teacher during the conversation, makes her what I have referred to as the “teacher-as-not-teacher.” Meaning, she remains a representative of (the possibility/intimation of) reasonableness and truth, while at the same time modeling the abandonment of the oath, and, thus, becoming a paradigm for the use of speech that is neither sacred, nor blasphemous, but profane.

6.3. Speech in P4I beyond the Sacred and Blasphemy: Profane Speech

But what kind of speech (that is neither sacred, nor blasphemous, or vain speech) is that exactly that is exemplified by the silence of the teacher-as-not-teacher (whether actual silence, or speech without truth-conditions), and then enacted by the students during the conversation in P4I. How is it different, for example, from the speech in the community of inquiry (in P4C)? If it is about the experience of in-fancy, that is, of language in its potentiality, as such, are the actual contributions significant, or valuable in their own right? Does it matter whether the conversation is reasonable or not?

As we have seen in the previous section, what stays intact in the conversation part of P4I, is the role of the teacher as the representative of power, while at the same time, through her silence, disconnecting the power from language, and thus, suspending the sacrament of language during the conversation-component of the practice. The fact that the practice is set up by the teacher-as-teacher (establishing procedural rules, offering prompts to generate questions, etc.), there is an intimation of truth, due to the assumption that the questions the students come up with should have answers, and, more generally, that we can say things about the world that are true (not just for us, but in general). And insofar as the teacher stays present throughout the practice, to enforce the procedural

rules (as “teacher-as-teacher”) means that the intimation of truth is maintained/preserved, leading the students to continue to engage in more or less reasonable speech aimed at coming up with answers to the questions at hand. At the same time, by falling silent (by becoming a teacher-as-not-teacher, a paradigm of profane speech, i.e., either through actual silence, or through the use of speech without truth-conditions), the teacher demonstrates the free use of language (released from the sacred realm), and allows the students to experience the limits of reasonableness, and, thus, the contingency of language. But because the continued intimation of truth, the experience of a pure language, the potentiality to speak, does not simply turn into blasphemous or meaningless speech.⁸¹

What is important to keep in mind is that the students are, of course, already socialized to use language in a more or less reasonable way. That is, students already bring to the conversation, some kind of meaningful speech, based on established ways of speaking. So it is not as if they would start speaking nonsensically (they couldn’t, even if they tried). Rather, they use the kind of language that they have been socialized into, both, in terms of content, and form. But what happens (through the experience of the contingency of language) is that language is now made available for their free use (see also Masschelein & Simons on “free use”), which means that instead of the speech itself becoming different in P4I, what is different is that the limits of the reasonableness of that

⁸¹ We might say that by asking the students to come up with a question, the teacher implies that there is an answer, and, we could say that the oath is (re)instated, but only in the form of a parody: “There may be answers, there may be truth, but I don’t have it, but let’s see what we/you can up with. I will continue to be the teacher, but only to keep the order (telling you what to do), but not telling you what to say or think because I don’t know what to think myself”.

kind of speech are being revealed to them. So the conversation continues to use speech in ways familiar to the students (which naturally includes giving reasons, making arguments, and many other forms of speech), but there is a realization that there is no ultimate direction, no ultimate truth, or some ultimate/objective standard of how to speak better (more properly), which changes the way speech in P4I is experienced (appreciated in its own right, i.e., in its particularity).

And it is this difference in the quality of content (individual contributions, speech acts) in P4I that characterizes the specifically educational *use* of the practice. It is a relatively slight change in how students experience their own speech, and that of others: Appreciating what is being said, and how it is being said, without being directed at some outcome in the future. And rather than becoming less important or meaningful because of the realization of the contingency of individual contributions, their individual contributions could be said to become more meaningful, because rather than being only (or primarily) valued in relation to some kind of objective truth (independent of the specific contribution of the individual student), they become valued in their particularity—as a particular expression, by a particular individual, in a particular situation, at a particular time.

In terms of how speech in P4I compares to that in P4C, we would have to say that what defines speech in P4I is not its formal appearance. In fact, the actual conversation in P4I may be indistinguishable from rational discourse (expressing opinions, making and supporting arguments), or, it may seem random, contradictory, redundant. Rather, what defines the speech in P4I is the lack of a framework of rationality, truth, and specific truth

conditions (due to the silence of the voice of the teacher), that leads to a different experience of speech by the members of the community of in-fancy, completely independent of the degree of rational discourse exhibited.

While the kind of speech that is made possible in P4I (in its particularity) that allows students to appreciate things they themselves and others say, in their particularity, could be seen as educationally (or pedagogically) beneficial, my goal is to show that the *use* of P4I in education, is about the experience of in-fancy as valuable for its own sake, that is, as a means without an end. Before speaking in more detail about the kinds of experience made possible by the kind of speech enacted in P4I (one individual, one communal), I introduce the Agambenian concept of *use* (itself a liminal term) to capture the particular nature or status of the practice, and the experience it makes possible, between valuable and valueless, good for something and good for nothing, useful and useless.

6.4. The Educational *Use* of Philosophy for In-fancy

Having, so far, referred to the educational value of the practice of P4I, when addressing the question of why we should engage in this practice in an educational context, I will now replace this term with the Agambenian concept of use as a way to capture the particular status of role of the experience of in-fancy in P4I (as neither an outcome, nor simply the opposite of an outcome). The term use has a very particular meaning for Agamben, and is central to Agamben's most recent work, and in particular, *The Use of Bodies* (2016). Whereas value carries with it a sense of being useful for something (whether it is applied to a thing, a person, or an activity), Agamben's term *use*

is itself a liminal term, meaning, it is neither just descriptive nor evaluative.⁸² Similar to the way Agamben uses im-potentiality to refer to an emphatic idea of potentiality (true, or pure potentiality), we could speak of use (the way Agamben understands it), as “pure use”—that is, a praxis that is happening on the boarder (or threshold) of usefulness and uselessness.

While the term use has become more important in Agamben’s most recent work, we find it already in some of his early texts. For example, in the context of discussing Benjamin’s reading of Kafka, he writes: “One day humanity will play with law just as children play with *disused* objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical *use* but to free them from it for good” (2005, p. 64, emphasis mine, see also Kotsko, 2014). Use here, is neither just descriptive, nor evaluative/normative, just like the activity it refers to is neither good for something, nor good for nothing, neither producing something, nor being simply un-productive. Pointing to the similarity between use and contemplation (as an activity or state between not-doing, and not not-doing), Agamben writes:

“Contemplation is the paradigm of use” (2016, p. 63).⁸³ If contemplation is the paradigm

⁸² From Kotsko (2014) about use as a liminal term: “It can’t be a matter of getting away from abstract concepts and into lived experience, because our life and our politics play out precisely at the point of intersection between life and abstraction, between the human animal and language. Theory and practice, study and play, both have equal rights here, because both converge at the horizon of anthropogenesis—and thus both give us the opportunity to make that small change that will allow us to become human again, but differently this time. If Agamben is calling us to do anything, it is to dare to attempt that small change that will make all things new” (2014, p. 10).

⁸³ “Like use, contemplation does not have a subject, because in it the contemplator is completely lost and dissolved; like use, contemplation does not have an object, because in the work it contemplates only its (own) potential. Life, which contemplates in the work its (own) potential of acting or making, is rendered inoperative in all its works and lives only in use-of-itself, lives only (its) livability. We write ‘own’ and ‘its’ in parentheses because only through the contemplation of potential, which renders inoperative every *energeia* and every work, does something like the experience of an ‘own’ and a ‘self’ become possible. ... habitual use is a contemplation and contemplation is a form of life. (ibid., p. 63).

(paradigmatic “activity”) of use, then we could say that study (as Lewis understands the term) is the paradigm of use in education (educational use), making the practice of philosophy for in-fancy one example of educational *use*.

In the following, I will distinguish between two different kinds of educational *use* of P4I, one individual and one communal, that correspond to two closely related experiences that are made possible by the kind of profane speech that is being enacted in P4I—one being the individual experience of in-fancy as a radical openness to possible ways of speaking, the other the communal experience of engaging in an experimentation with concepts and experiencing in-fancy with others. These two types of experience correspond to Lewis’ distinction between studying alone and studying with one’s friends. According to Lewis, what leads to an experience of “ease” when studying is that there is a lack of “any desire to reach an end beyond ease itself,” Lewis, 2013, p. 48). And while the experience in P4I is primarily communal, it is of course only an individual who can have the experience. It therefore seems to make sense to distinguish between the kind of ease that is made possible by the experience of in-fancy (whether alone, or in the context of a P4I-session), and the ease that requires engaging in a communal experience of in-fancy with others. I will now consider these two different kinds of ease that, together, constitute the educational use of P4I, in turn.

6.4.1. Individual well-being: Ease. I will build here on what has already been said about the experience of in-fancy in the practice of philosophy (Agamben), philosophy with children (Marsal, Martens), and Lewis’ notion of *study* as a *weakly-utopian* (rather than utopian or simply non-utopian) practice. The focus here is on

articulating the particular *use* of the practice of P4I, at the level of the individual student, which corresponds, at an experiential level, to what Lewis calls *ease* (as opposed to *being at ease with one's friends*). When we are studying, so Lewis, we are in a state in which we are moved toward new ideas/ways of looking at things, without being directed at a particular goal or result. While there is an element of the new—of new ways of speaking, thinking, and seeing the world—the emphasis is not on the new as such, but on trying out different possible constellations that are being realized in the present. We are using whatever it is we come across as if it had lost its original use (see Agamben's reference to children playing with disused objects, cited above). Lewis uses the term “weakly utopian” to capture exactly this combination (the two sides of use), namely moving toward ever new constellations, but doing so not in order to actualize something in the future (new and better), but as something that is experienced as enjoyable/pleasurable in the moment. It is what we experience in that state that Lewis refers to as *ease*.

But why would we experience the formation of new constellation, new possibilities of speaking, and thinking, without the need to actualize specific goals or outcomes, as inherently pleasurable? We can answer this question in two different ways: One is to say that the kind of openness experienced in study allows us to experience a capability that is constitutive for being human, which, for Agamben means, the capability that stems from the fact that we do not have a (particular) nature, that is, to be what he calls whatever beings. What characterizes humans as whatever beings, according to Agamben, is that “there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize” (1993a, p. 43), and that the only thing humans

have to be, consists in “the simple fact of one’s existence as possibility or potentiality” (ibid.). Realizing more fully this defining feature of our being, for Agamben, is an inherent source of enjoyment and happiness. He writes: “The impropriety, which we expose as our proper being, manner, which we *use*, engenders us. It is our second, happier, nature” (ibid., p. 29).⁸⁴

Applying this to education, the experience of ease could be seen as a fuller realization of a defining feature of our humanity, and (thus) the realization of an inherently more pleasurable way of being. Rather than being focused on the idea of learning as particular kind of actualization (the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills), studying is about the realization of not having to know, or do, anything in particular, and of not having to live in a particular way. Just like there is a life (in general) that is different from the life of the learner in the learning society, there is an educational form of life that is different from that based on the logic of learning. Lewis writes:

In its profanation, the dispersed and decentered apparatuses of learning are left to idle, and thus opened to unforeseen usages beyond measure and beyond identification with this or that utility within a market driven by entrepreneurial self-management. In this sense, to study is to live an educationally profane life without end. (Lewis, 2013, p. 15)

⁸⁴ The idea that the fuller realization of a defining feature of our nature is also the key to a happier, inherently desirable, life, is of course a very common figure in philosophical positions, whether it is Plato’s living according to the tripartite form of the soul, or Marx’ species being, or Dewey’s idea of the experience of the unity of opposites. Only that here our proper being, consists in not having a proper being, that is what Agamben calls our impropriety.

So one way of capturing the use of P4I, is to argue that it allows for a fuller realization of a constitutive, and defining feature of our humanity, that is, for that reason, inherently desirable.

Another way of answering the question, is to point to the experience itself, and to try to capture more fully what characterizes the experience Lewis describes as ease, and to try to articulate more clearly the particular quality of the experience that corresponds to the educational use of P4I, at the level of individual experience. First of all, we can say that the key to Lewis' understanding of ease as the happiness of the studier, is that the studier does not adhere to the idea that happiness is about fulfillment (or actualization), but about being in a state of well-being (ease) that doesn't require fulfillment. For Lewis, the form of life the studier represents, is an idea the good life that offers an alternative to one driven by profit maximization (at the level of society), and the educational equivalent, the maximization of outcome-driven learning. Referring here to Agamben, he describes the former as a "Promethean hubris ... that is also found in the biocapitalist logic of infinite expansion and profit generation" (Lewis, 2013, p. 9).⁸⁵

For Lewis, the figure of Bartleby, the title character in Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener," is a paradigmatic example of the studier, and, thus, of the particular kind of individual well-being (i.e., ease) the life of the studier makes possible. For Lewis, Bartleby is a symbol of a kind of well-being, or happiness that is diametrically

⁸⁵ For Agamben, Lewis writes, "neoliberal democracy and pornography share a similar form of evil: the empty promise of total fulfillment and gratification of our desires. ... The lie of contemporary democratic hubris as well as pornography is that happiness can be and must be fulfilled" (Lewis, 2013, p. 9).

opposed to the one described above—admittedly in its most extreme form, and maybe representing a limit case of this form of life. Lewis writes:

To ‘prefer not to’ opens up a new notion of living that (a) stands before the law of production, utility, and examination yet (b) suspends the efficacy of this law in order to (c) study the im-potentiality that shines forth. This is an educational life of *ease* without any desire for mastery, without any desire to reach an end beyond ease itself. (ibid., p. 48)

So here, we could say that what defines the life of the studier (*ex negativo*) is that it allows for something that the other life is lacking, namely a state of im-potentiality, and the experience of in-fancy. A more positive account of the experience of ease, are Lewis’ reflections on the way in which Bartleby is described by his employer, which, for Lewis, encapsulates what the particular kind of happiness of the studier consists in:

‘But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me’ ... This strange mystery that resides in Bartleby’s behavior is precisely the ease at which he prefers not to—an ease that indicates a life beyond the performance principle, a life of pure potentiality that shines forth in the most im-potential of gestures. What is disconcerting is the im-potential withdrawal of productivity upon which Wall Street—and its internal logic of learning—functions, leaving only a sense of ‘wonderful’ ease wherein humanity can appear as it is: nude in its pure livability, vulnerable, silent, and at the same time powerfully disarming. The only preference that

seems to interrupt the continual flow of goods and services defining the economy is in the end the preference not to prefer. (ibid., p. 49)

So here we can come back to what we already said about the realization of that maybe most human aspect of our nature, that we don't have a nature, making humanity "nude in its pure livability, vulnerable, silent, and at the same time powerfully disarming" (ibid.)

One of the key differences between the experience of ease in individual study, and the corresponding experience in P4I, is, of course, that P4I is primarily a communal practice (discussed in more detailed in the next section). This in itself changes the individual nature of ease, and may account for a more upbeat version of individual ease from that experienced by Bartleby, with more of an emphasis on an increased attention to things and ideas in their particularity (Hampe), a "playing with ideas" (Marsal), a "free movement of the mind" (Martens), and an experience of things for the first time, or "as-if" for the first time (Hampe, Agamben, Kohan), which could all be seen as facets of the experience of ease, at the level of the individual, and, thus, as one of the educational uses of P4I.

It should be pointed out that this does not mean that including opportunities to study (such as P4I), in education, means to prepare students for a life of study (or the life of philosophy, for that matter), which would still make it a developmental (and utopian) model in that it would ultimately be directed toward some kind of better life in the future. Rather, the educational use of P4I that allows for the experience of ease is simply an enactment of a particular form of a happy life, a life that lacks the need to strive, or

actualize anything in particular, allowing for the possibility, as Lewis puts it, “to live an educationally profane life without end” (2013, p. 15).

6.4.2. Communal well-being: Being at ease with one’s friends. Having looked at the use of P4I, as an individual well-being (ease), I will now turn to the well-being that is characteristic for P4I as a communal practice, namely what Lewis calls “*Being at Ease With One’s Friends*”. This is in a way the more originary form of well-being or ease of P4I, because in contrast to solitary forms of study, studying with friends, is the constitutive format of the practice of P4I. As already mentioned, it may be this fact alone that makes P4I into a more joyful type of study, and it seems fair to assume that Batleby’s experience of studying would have been different, had he had friends to study with.

With regard to the communal use of the practice, that is, of “being at ease with one’s friends,” we can distinguish between: 1) the kind of connection that is made possible between the members of the P4I-classroom, due to the experience of the contingency of language, leading the members of the community to relate to each other as whatever beings/singularities (that is, of what Agamben calls love), and, 2) the effect this has on the way we experience not only our own ideas and those of others, in their particularity (as-if-for-the-first-time). The two re-enforce each other: the experience of speech without truth-conditions leads us to perceive others in a state of in-fancy, i.e., as whatever beings, which makes possible the experience of ease and love, while perceiving others in that way, re-enforces the experience of enjoying what is being said in its particularity. I will here briefly recap what has already been said about the experience of

speech in P4I, before talking more about the particular communal kind of ease (that Agamben calls love) in the P4I classroom community.

What makes the particular kind of communal experience of ease/love possible is the kind of speech characteristic for P4I, namely profane speech. More specifically, it is the particular way in which the students experience the content of the conversation itself (what is being said), in its particularity, that is itself an important facet of the educational use of the practice (which is also the reason why the conversation in the Socratic Community of Perpetual Conversation continues, in spite of realizing that there are no ultimate answers).⁸⁶ Without a reference point with regard to knowledge or truth, the students in the P4I classroom take whatever is being said in its own right. In other words, rather than assessing or evaluating what is being said in relation to an established framework of truth and knowledge, the students perceive each contribution as equally valid (or as neither valid nor invalid).

This kind of speech, allows for a particular communal sense of ease (“being at ease with one’s friends”) that corresponds to what Agamben calls love, which could be said to be the particular kind of affection we receive from the use of P4I. For Agamben, love (in the particular sense he uses the term), is as a relationship between *singularities* or *whatever beings*, i.e., persons that are themselves—and relate to others—as being in a state of in-fancy (Agamben, 1993a). For Agamben, what characterizes this kind of

⁸⁶ Rancière expresses very nicely the nature of this kind of conversation, and the kind of pleasure we derive from it: “The principal service that man can expect from man depends on that faculty of intercommunicating their pleasure and pain, hopes and fears, in order to be moved reciprocally: ‘... The exercise of that power is at once the sweetest of our pleasures and the most demanding of our needs.’” (1989, p. 72).

relationship is that it combines contingency (we could each be anything or anybody), and facticity—we happen to be what/whoever we are in our particularity. The most characteristic (and puzzling) feature of the experience of love, for Agamben, is that we love another person for what that person is (his or her particular attributes), and, at the same time, independent of—and maybe in spite of—such attributes. “Love,” Agamben writes, “is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love). The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is” (1993a, p. 2, emphasis in original). Another way of saying this would be to say that we love a person for whatever they are, that is, for “what” they are *and* “no matter what” they are. Agamben calls a being that we relate to in this way a “whatever being,” or a “singularity.” “The singularity,” he writes, “exposed as such is whatever you *want*, that is, lovable” (ibid, p. 2). In other words, as a singularity a person is whatever he or she is, not because of their attributes in relation to a general concept (e.g., being French) that allows us to distinguish them or think of them as different from other individuals (e.g., those who are Italian). This means that, according to Agamben, “[w]hatever singularity has no identity it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to ... the totality of its possibilities” (ibid, p. 67). It is in this sense that the lack of a point of reference in terms of knowledge and truth allows students to experience each other as whatever beings, or, singularities (that is, as both particular and contingent) and, thus, to love each other.

So the use of P4I is to experience ease, which, like use, and happiness, is a liminal term. Like happiness, or *eudaimonia*, for Aristotle, love, for Agamben, is a state of well-being that—unlike than all other pursuits—is not good for anything else, but only good for itself. P4I, then, is an example of a specifically educational form of use (studying with friends) that allows for a kind of communal well-being, that Lewis calls “being at ease with one’s friends,” and that Agamben calls love.

Looked at it from the perspective of the community, instead of the individual, we can say that rather than a community of inquiry (an intentional community), the community that is made possible through the experience of in-fancy, could instead said to be in-tentional, that is, not defined in relation to predetermined success conditions. In contrast to communities of learning, what is preserved in an in-tentional community, is im-potentiality (the ability not to be or do this or that). For Agamben, this is what makes a true community possible. Using “community” here in an emphatic sense (i.e., an actual, or true community), Agamben writes:

Among beings who would always already be enacted ... there could not be any community but only coincidences and factual partitions. We can communicate with others only through what in us—as much as in others—has remained potential, and any communication ... is first of all communication not of something in common but of communicability itself. (2000, p. 10)

In other words, rather than being a tool for the realization of a pre-conceived goal or outcome, such a community creates the communal experience of openness and

indeterminacy that accounts for what Agamben calls the “power of community” (Agamben, 1993; 2000). The P4I classroom is a place where the coming community can be lived and experienced, in the present. Thus, “P4I is not about preparing students for this or that life but rather about the appearance of a form of educational life [and life, in general] that suspends the logic of reasonableness and truth in the name of pure mediativity, the gesture of communicability that is held in common” (Jasinski & Lewis, 2015, p. 15).

What makes this experience of ease/love possible is the radical abandonment of the students caused by the teacher’s silence. It is exactly the silence of the voice of the teacher (the teacher’s role as a paradigm of infancy) that allows his or her own *whatever being* to come to the foreground, which opens up a space and time of love beyond the fetishization of particular identities over singularities. The teacher’s silence is pedagogical, offering itself as a paradigm of whatever makes love possible. Both, in terms of providing a space and time for love to emerge among the students, but also in the sense of showing his or her love for the students. “When the teacher falls silent, she demonstrates that she loves the students not because of their specific properties (their perceived skills, talents, or interests), but as whatever they are (in excess/independent of perceived skills, talents, or interests)” (Jasinski & Lewis, 2017).

Like Aristotle’s idea of happiness as a “complete and sufficient good,” Agamben states that “[t]his ‘happy life’ should be ... an absolutely ‘sufficient life.’ That has reached the perfection of its own power of its own communicability—a life of which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold” (Agamben, 2000, p. 113-114). The

experience made possible in P4I, the experience of ease, and love, could be said to represent the educational equivalent of such a sufficient, and, thus, happy life.⁸⁷

6.5. Summary

In this chapter, I built on what has already been prepared in the previous chapters to show what the practice of philosophy based on in-fancy looks like, at the level of the classroom. Specifically, I described the dynamics among the members of the P4I-classroom that lead to the experience of in-fancy (teacher-as-not-teacher), how this experience leads to a particular kind of speech (profane speech), which, in turn, allows for a particular kind of individual and communal well-being (ease, love). My intention was to make it plausible that the experiences described here, both at the level of experience for the individual student, and at the communal level (the kind of classroom community P4I makes possible), should be thought of as inherently desirable and should therefore be made available in educational settings as a possible form of life.

In terms of the feasibility of Philosophy for Infancy: P4I is uniquely positioned to provide a space within the school where the voice of the teacher can (at least temporarily) be suspended, and where this can be done responsibly. There are several reasons for this. First of all, in contrast to factual questions, philosophical questions are truly open, i.e., there is not just one possible correct answer. At the same time, there is an intimation of truth, that is, there is an assumption that the questions being discussed (What is time?

⁸⁷ Which is also why, for Agamben, the point is not to strive for a happier life, in the form of a political movement. Expressing this paradoxical idea of the pursuit of the good life, Prozorov writes: “Agamben’s refusal to posit this step towards a happy life as a new task, a political project, in relation to which one could talk about social mobilization, raising awareness, articulation of particular interests into a (counter-)hegemonic constellation, etc., since all of the above would contradict his ontological affirmation of ‘inoperosity’ (absence of work) as an originary characteristic of the human condition” (2010, p. 1054).

Can we ever be truly happy?) *should* have answers—which keeps the conversation going. Finally, students have everything they need (i.e., language) to participate in this conversation. In contrast, open-ended discussion in other subjects (e.g., science, history, math) can either be only temporary (because there are specific answers that are based on a body of knowledge that only the teacher has), or, as may be the case in the humanities (e.g., English or Art), the discussions revolve around questions of taste or personal preferences, in which case what is lacking is the intimation of truth that drives and sustains the discussion in P4C.

Having looked at the value of P4I at the classroom level, I will, in the following chapter consider the wider context of the classroom—namely the school house and the school community—as well as the society of which the school forms a part.

Chapter 7: The Use of P4I in the School and Society

7.1. Introduction

In the last chapter, I looked at the role of P4I in the classroom, and how the role of the teacher creates a certain kind of speech (profane speech) that leads to a particular kind of experience (in-fancy), that, in turn, allows for a certain kind of well-being (ease), at both an individual, and communal level. The reason P4I can, and should, be included in education, I argued, is that it represents an inherently desirable form of life that should be made available to students. What I will explore in this chapter, is the role of P4I-classroom communities in schools and in the society as a whole. My intention is not to argue for P4I as a pedagogical practice aimed at the realization of specific educational goals or outcomes—something that would be antithetical to Agamben’s idea of inoperativity, and to P4I as a practice that is defined by its lack of directionality. In other words, the relationship between the practice and its use in schools, and society as a whole, is not a causal relationship, where P4I might be seen as part of a reform effort that proposes specific changes in pedagogy aimed at better schools, a better society, or a better world. Instead, I argue, in this concluding chapter, that P4I should be seen as a paradigm for non-directional practices that allow for the experience of openness toward possibilities, without determining, or prescribing, what those possibilities might be.

I will here briefly explain what I mean by saying that P4I should be thought of as a *paradigm* in schools, and the society as a whole. In contrast to the way Agamben uses the term paradigm when referring to the interpretation of phenomena (which is also the way I used paradigm in the Methodology-section), I am applying here a different way in

which Agamben uses the term (2010, 2013), namely to explain the role of a particular form of life within a larger societal context. In particular, he uses it when talking about the form of life of a monastic order, which he refers to as a paradigm of “form-of-life.” By “form-of-life” he means “a life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable from it,” thus, turning into a paradigm for the “ideal of a communal form of life” (2013, p. xi) within the society of which it is a part. The Franciscan monastic order, in particular, represents, for Agamben, an example of form-of-life, insofar as it is “a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation,” allowing us to “think life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use” (2013, xiii). He acknowledges the challenge posed by the idea of appropriating a form of life that is inappropriable, asking: “How can use—that is, a relation to the world insofar as it is inappropriable—be translated into an ethos and a form of life? And what ontology and which ethics would correspond to a life that, in use, is constituted as inseparable from its form?” (ibid., p. 144). As is clear from this quote, there is a close connection between the idea of form-of-life and the idea of use (as previously discussed), that could be summarized by saying that use (making use of things without appropriating them) is a defining feature of form-of-life. Referring, in the following quote, to the Monastic order, where life has become detached from following the law (the rules that govern monastic life), Agamben writes:

But what is a life outside the law, if it is defined as that form of life which makes use of things without ever appropriating them? And what is use, if

one ceases to define it solely negatively with respect to ownership? ...

How can use—that is, a relation to the world insofar as it is

inappropriable—be translated into an ethos and a form of life? And what

ontology and which ethics would correspond to a life that, in use, is

constituted as inseparable from its form? (ibid., pp. 144-145?)⁸⁸

For Agamben, the very existence or presence of such a form of life, “allows us to glimpse another, uncertain dimension of acting and being” (ibid., p. 87), making it an example of a possible way to live. Similarly, the presence of P4I in schools (and, thus, society) should be seen as a paradigm, understood in this sense: allowing students “to glimpse another, uncertain dimension of acting and being” that serves as an example of a particular form of life, an example that students may (or may not) choose to adopt or follow. Like the monastic orders that, according to Agamben, functioning as a paradigm for the societies of which they were a part, P4I could equally be seen as a paradigm for what Agamben calls a coming community, or coming politics (in the present). To use another example for the way paradigm is used here (albeit in a negative or critical sense), we can think of Foucault’s *panoptikon*, that, as an actual place, served both as a reflection of existing power-structures (in this case as a “diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form,” as Foucault puts it, 1977, p. 205), while at the same time, by its very

⁸⁸ Continuing: “The attempt to respond to these questions will necessarily demand a confrontation with the operative ontological paradigm into whose mold liturgy, by means of a secular process, has ended up forcing the ethics and politics of the West. ... [I]t is clear that only by taking up the confrontation again from a new perspective will we perhaps be able to decide whether and to what extent that which appears in Olivi as the extreme form of life of the Christian West has any meaning for it—or whether, on the contrary, the planetary dominion of the paradigm of operativity demands the decisive confrontation be shifted to another terrain” (ibid., pp. 144-145).

presence, reinforcing such power structures. In the same way, P4I could be said to represent a scholastic and societal form of life that—through its very presence—points to the possibility of a different kind of community, or society, in the present.

With regard to the school, I will here employ Lewis' idea of the *notch* as a way to think of an educational practice (time and space) that is not directed at any specific change, improvement, or educational goal, and instead represents pure potentiality (2013, p. 92ff.). Like Lewis' notion of study, the practice of P4I, I argue, can be seen as such a notch in the school, and the school curriculum. Building on the idea of love as the defining experience within the P4I classroom community, I will then make a connection between Agamben's notion of love in the community of P4I, and Masschelein and Simons' idea that what the teacher does (or should do) is to share her love of the world with the students. The experience of love in P4I, I argue, should be seen as a paradigm for a conception of education based on the idea of sharing one's love of the world.

In the second part of this chapter, I will look at the presence of the practice of P4I in classrooms and schools, for society, in the sense of being a paradigm (in the way specified above). I will here again use the idea of weak utopianism to stress the fact that the inclusion of P4I into the curriculum is not about the preparation of students for the realization of a better society, in the future. Rather, I propose that we should think of the role of P4I, as a paradigm of a particular form of life, within the context of a given society, as it exists at a given moment. A form of life that does not aim at, but merely allows for the possibility of its continuation, or proliferation, as a possible form of life, in the future. To illustrate what this might mean more concretely, I will consider three

models of society, within which P4I might be regarded as a paradigmatic form of life: Dewey's "great community" (2012), Rorty's "liberal utopia" (1989), and, Agamben's "coming community" (1993a). All three models of society, I intend to show, contain the idea of a community that is engaged in an open-ended articulation of possible ways of speaking (and, thus, thinking and acting), for which the practice of P4I could be seen as an example, or paradigm. While Dewey's and Rorty's models of society might be seen as compatible with P4I, it is—not surprisingly—Agamben's model of a "coming community," that aligns most fully with P4I as a paradigmatic practice.

7.2. The Role of P4I in the School Community

As already mentioned, the role of P4I in schools is not one that establishes a direct causality between the practice and any kind of specific quantifiable/measurable effects. What I argue instead, is that the experience that is made possible for students in the P4I-classroom changes the way in which the students experience their other classes, and their relationship to the other members of the school community. What the practice of P4I as a paradigm does is that it makes available a space and time for the experience of unspecified possibilities (and possibility as such), that may (or may not) lead to a proliferation of such experiences throughout the school, and, thus, shape the students educational experience, as a whole.

7.2.1. The P4I-classroom as the notch in the architecture of the school. Lewis describes the difference of weak utopianism to strong/classical utopianism as follows: "If strong utopianism builds blueprints in order to actualize or concretize the potentiality of the utopian imagination, then weak utopianism resists constructing such blueprints in

order to live within the im-potentiality of present possibilities” (2013, p. 95). Applied to the role of P4I in the curriculum, we can say that P4I is a paradigm for living “within the im-potentiality of present possibilities” (ibid.). Utopian should be understood here in both a temporal and spatial sense, meaning that the classroom is weakly utopian as a *u-topos* (a non-place) in the school architecture (weakly transcendent with regard to the school architecture as a whole), and weakly utopian in a temporal sense, in that it is directed toward/intimating truth, but within the time of the class period.

I adopt here Lewis’ idea of the “notch” (Lewis, 2013, p. 92ff), as a way to capture the role of P4I, and the P4I-classroom, within the school (and the school curriculum). Lewis describes the notch as an addition of a seemingly insignificant feature into the classroom (such as a bay window) that “does not anticipate anything beyond itself” (ibid., p. 141). And yet, the very presence of a space that lacks a designated use, makes it a paradigm for pure potentiality (that something can be done and not be done) and, thus, an “example of weak messianic time and space at work” (ibid., p. 113), as a space that “opens up to new, collective experimentation” (ibid.).

Lewis himself adopts the idea of the notch from Tyack and Cuban, who use the “notch,” as an example of a step in the process of “Tinkering toward Utopia” (1995). Whereas, for them, the notch is “*oriented toward a future yet-to-come* that, in the end, erases the present moment as a now” (Lewis, 2013, p. 114, emphasis in original), Lewis sees it as an example of a weakly utopian (or messianic) time and space in the architecture of the school. For Lewis, what happens in the notch (i.e., tinkering),

should ... be thought of as a *pure means* rather than simply a *means to another end*. ... the surplus space of the notch does not anticipate anything beyond itself. No specific learning outcomes are called for and no specific learning activities are inscribed in its form. Rather, it merely introduces a new dimension into the square of the classroom for free use, for new innovation within the present. (2013, p. 114)

For Lewis, the classroom that includes the notch is an example of weak messianic time and space, in the sense that “[r]ather than the classroom today ‘as if’ it were the classroom of tomorrow, it is the classroom of today ‘as not’ the classroom of today” (ibid., p. 113). As such, it is, for Lewis, “an inessential supplement” or “supplemental possibility” that is “poised at the very limit of the grammar of the schoolhouse” (ibid., p. 114). He emphasizes that, while, as a messianic space, there is a suspension of the “authority of the grammar of the classroom,” for him, “[t]his suspension is not a rejection of the school ... but a profanation of what exists: the notch is not any one’s property, is not in anyone’s control, and is not destined for any one particular use. It is the classroom as not a classroom. It is the space of study” (ibid., p. 114), making the notch “the ‘weak’ architectural form of im-potentiality without predefining the specific social or educational ends which must be fulfilled” (ibid.). So, rather than being designed with a particular goal or outcome in mind, the notch instead leaves possibilities open, or, as Lewis puts it “aims not to make some actions and events impossible” (ibid., p. 115). And he adds: “Instead of destroying, design as tinkering preserves but only for the purpose of opening up the possibility for exploring potentiality anew” (ibid.).

Applying Lewis' notion of the notch to the role of the P4I classroom in the school, the P4I classroom can be seen as a paradigm for an experimentation with concepts that allows students to experience language and communicability as such. And while the experience may be one of the now (of Messianic time and space), the students are of course carrying that experience with them as they leave the classroom. As Agamben puts it, in the context of speaking about a conception of history based on a non-linear notion of time:

He who, in the *epoché* of pleasure, has remembered history as he would remember his original home, will bring this memory to everything, will exact this promise from each instant: he is the true revolutionary and the true seer, released from time not at the millennium, but *now*. (2007, p. 115)

In the same way, we can say that the student will remember the experience of in-fancy in the P4I, and bring it to everything—not in the sense that it will help her do anything better, or faster, or more efficiently. To the contrary, it is more likely to slow her down, make her pause, and wonder. But, at the same time, it will give her an example of a possible form of life that could be seen as an inherently desirable way of being in the world.

7.2.2. P4I as an example of education as sharing in the love of the world. In

the previous section, I explored the idea of P4I as a notch in the architecture of the school that allows for the experience of potentiality and how the student may carry that experience to her other classes, etc. What I will look at there is how the same is the case

with the regard to the experience of love as what binds the members of the community of the P4I-classroom together. In particular, I will look at how the experience of love in P4I may change the way in which the student relates to the teachers in her other classes.

To understand how the experience of love in P4I may play a role in the way students experience their other classes, I will bring in Masschelein and Simons' idea that what the teacher does (or should do) is to share her love of the world with the students (2013). For them, the teacher, as the teacher of a particular subject (e.g., Biology, Art, French), loves the students because of their potential to appreciate the subject she is teaching, which also represents a particular way of looking at, and loving the world (love the teacher embodies). For Masschelein and Simons, the "amateur teacher" (from Latin *amare*, to love) expresses her love of the world in all kinds of ways, ranging from "small, commonplace gestures," and "certain ways of speaking and listening" (2013, p. 67), to the way she allows students to "lose track of time" (ibid., p. 68), to the way she "*embodies* the subject matter in a certain way and has presence in the classroom" (ibid.). One way to recognize the amateur teacher, according to Masschelein & Simons, is by her efforts to share her love of the world with the students. The reason she shares her love of the world with them, we could say, is that she wants them to experience the world in a way she believes might be as rewarding to them as it is for her. The authors write:

The starting point is the love for the subject, for the subject matter, and for the students; a love that expresses itself in the opening up and sharing of the world. ... [T]he amateur teacher loves her subject and believes that

everyone, time and again, should be given the chance to engage

themselves in the subject matter she loves. (pp. 72-73)

One of the things this allows us to do is to see what the teacher in P4I is doing as sharing her love of *philosophy* with the students, by allowing them, through her silencing of the voice of the teacher, to experience for themselves, the im-potentiality of language (in-fancy) that she sees as the key to her own well-being.

Moreover, introducing students to, and, thus, sharing with them, a philosophical form of life, allows for a different relationship to the teacher, to each other, and to the subject matter. As such, the practice may be seen as a paradigm for a certain way of relating to knowledge and truth, in general, and as presented to them by teachers in other subjects. Rather than seeing the respective subject matter in their various classes as objectively significant or important (something one ought to know, or skills one ought to have), they may instead experience it as an expression of a particular kind of love of the world (the world seen through the eyes of a biologist, mathematician, historian). And whatever way of loving the world they end up choosing for themselves, this experience is likely to make them retain an appreciation for the fact that there are other ways of loving the world (equally contingent, neither better nor worse) that are (and remain) possible for them. Moreover, not being expected to love the world in one particular way, and being fully aware of the contingency of any of them, may make students see educational encounters, in their particularity, as an opportunity of sharing their love of the world with each other.

In summary, we could say that the student carries her experience in P4I with her, changing the way she experiences her other classes, her teachers, and the other students: Instead of seeing what is happening as merely the acquisition and transfer of specific knowledge and skills (aimed at functioning better, or being more successful), the experience made possible in the in-tentional classroom community of P4I (based on love), allows students to experience the knowledge and skills that their teachers share with them, in a different, and, quite possibly, more enjoyable way. The P4I-classroom does so by allowing for an experience of the opposite of outcome-driven functionality (what Lewis calls “negative functionalism”), serving as a counter-weight to the existing forces of instrumentalism/vocationalism. This general idea is already present in Dewey, Illich, Biesta, Masschelein and Simons, and Rancière, so the idea is not new, but, in the same way as the experience of in-fancy itself is not about the actualization of something new, as such, finding a new way of articulating this idea may itself be regarded as an exercise in weak utopianism, in that it offers a new and different articulation of the idea of the educational use of non-directional practices (such as study, and P4I) within the immanence of the practice of educational philosophy.

7.3. The Role of P4I in Conceptions of Society

In this section, I intend to explore the significance of the practice of P4I in schools, in relation to the society as a whole. I will follow here a similar strategy to the one employed in the first part of this chapter, namely that of looking at the possible role of the practice of P4I (in schools) as a paradigm for various conceptions of society. Again, my intention is not to describe the practice of P4I in schools as a tool to prepare

the young (*qua* future citizens) for the realization of a better society in the future. Rather, I want to think of the role of P4I in schools, as allowing for a certain kind of experience within (and as part of) society, as it currently exists.⁸⁹ While students may seek to continue or repeat the experience, or, in any case, carry it with them, it is not about better experiences in the future, but about the realization of a particular form of life, in the present. I will consider here three models of society, within which P4I might be regarded as a paradigmatic activity: Dewey's "great community" (2012), Rorty's "liberal utopia" (1989), and, Agamben's "coming community" (1993a).

7.3.1. P4I as a paradigm in Dewey's *great community*. What I will consider here, is to what extent the practice of P4I can be seen as a paradigmatic activity in what Dewey calls a "great community," which he sees as essential for the realization of a truly democratic society. Central to a society that functions as a great community, for Dewey, is a public that is characterized by a certain type of communication. "Society," he writes in *Democracy and Education*,

not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. (2004, p. 4)

⁸⁹ This idea is also expressed by Murris (2008), who is referring to Haynes (2008), when she writes that one of the things that P4C questions, is "what it means to be child and what it means to be treated as a citizen, rather than *citizen-to-be*" (Murris, 2008, p. 672).

And in “The Public and its Problems,” he writes:

Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless... Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues, but of signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible. (Dewey, 1984, pp. 323-324)

And, elaborating on this idea, he writes: “The prime difficulty, as we have seen, is that of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests” (ibid., p. 327). And: “The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy” (ibid., p. 328). Key here, is Dewey’s understanding of communication as a process of open-ended inquiry. While there is an assumption that continuous inquiry will lead to better things (a better world), I believe that one way of reading Dewey is that he sees the continuation of this aspect of a democratic society, in the continuous present, itself, as what constitutes the realization of a better world. In other words, rather than being aimed at some preconceived idea of what society may look like in the future, it is the continuation of an open-ended process of inquiry (and the procedural structures that make it possible) that is the closest we can get to the realization of an ideal society.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Hampe expresses this well, when he writes: “This kind of democracy, according to Dewey, is the name for ‘the idea of community life as such [*das Gemeinschaftsleben selbst*],’ By ‘community life’ he means the right community, in the sense that no power is exerted over individuals through persons or structures, but that education is used to enable them to develop their own goals [*Zielvorstellungen*] with each other without depending on some transcendence—be it in the form of religious ideas of the hereafter, or some kind of superior [*ihnen übergeordeter*] rulers, or experts” (2014, p. 273).

There are two somewhat diverging lines in Dewey's thinking: On the one hand, he stresses the role of habit (referring here to James' famous passage on habit as the "enormous fly-wheel of society"), writing, for example, that "[h]abit does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates" (ibid., p. 335), or that "[t]hinking is secreted in the interstices of habits" (ibid.), or, finally that

[t]hinking itself becomes habitual along certain lines; a specialized occupation. Scientific men, philosophers, literary persons, are not men and women who have so broken the bonds of habits that pure reason and emotion undefiled by use and wont speak through them. They are persons of a specialized infrequent habit. (ibid.)

At the same time, he clearly acknowledges the role of language for the possibility of the kind of communication he sees as essential for democracy. This is clear when, after spending a lot of time talking about the importance of the language of science over natural language, he concludes the chapter on the great community, in *The Public and its Problems*, in the following way:

The freeing of the artist in literary presentation ... is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry. ... The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness. ... Poetry, the drama, the novel, are proofs that the problem of presentation is not insoluble. ... The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of

communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means to life and not its despotic master. Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication. (ibid., p. 350)

In other words, he turns here to language, and the creative (artistic) use of language in literature and poetry, in particular, as an essential feature of what he calls “full and moving communication.”

This is even more evident in “Art as Experience” (Dewey, 1987), where he describes art as a language superior to natural language, as a way of sharing experiences:

For it is by activities that are shared by language and other means of intercourse that qualities and values become common to the experience of a group of mankind. Now art is the most effective mode of communication that exists. (1987, p. 291)

In other words, for Dewey, art could be said to function as language, if, as he writes in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1986) “language is taken in its widest sense, a sense wider than oral and written speech. It includes the latter. But it includes also not only gesture but rites, ceremonies, monuments and the products of industrial and fine arts” (ibid., pp. 51-52). As such,

[a]esthetic experience, that which humans share in common, regardless of linguistic cultural practices, is a unifying fabric of humanity. Membership in the great community would require communication on levels that language alone is incapable of delivering due to the vast diversity of languages utilized. If these barriers are to be overcome, it will only be by way of artistic communication and the cultivation of an aesthetic experience required for participating in this communication. (Dewey, 1986, p. 46)

In other words, Dewey could be said to come very close here to describing a state of in-fancy (*qua* im-potentiality of language), that is, a state in which language and not language is indistinguishable, allowing for new (and possibly better) ways of communicating. And, not unlike the idea of perpetual conversation in the Socratic community, communication in the great community, can be thought of as a perpetual, and infinite process. As Philip S. Bishop writes: “The utilization of social inquiry to diagnose, evaluate, hypothesize and experiment would never cease in the great community, and these inquiries would be the elixir by which the democratic culture would stay young” (2010, p. 123).

But how could P4I be seen as paradigm (in education) for this kind of idea of communication in Dewey’s great community? Especially given that Dewey sees what is happening in education as requiring some degree of directionality to be educational at all, and to allow for a movement toward new and better experiences, in the future. As I have tried to show previously, there is also the idea of in-fancy (albeit not fully realized) in his

conception of education. The same could also be said about his social and political writings, where we can find examples of him suggesting a view of the role of education in society that seems compatible with the idea of the practice in P4I. I am thinking here especially of an article entitled “Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools” (Dewey, 1986). In this outline of his idea of schooling in an ideal society that is strikingly similar to Illich’s ideas in *Deschooling Society* (1970), he describes a utopian society (named *Utopia*) where there are no longer schools. “The Most Utopian thing in Utopia is that there are no schools at all,” he begins. And he continues:

Education is carried on without anything of the nature of schools, or, if this idea is so extreme that we cannot conceive of it as educational at all, then we may say nothing of the sort at present we know as schools. Children, however, are gathered together in association with older and more mature people who direct their activity. (1986, p. 136)

The reason this text is interesting here is that his description of what is going on in his utopian school may be seen as a realization of (rather than a preparation for) life in the great community. It seems that in this utopian (or maybe rather un-, or weakly-utopian) vision of education, he fully embraces the idea of pure experience made possible by engaging in activities that are not directed at the realization of any particular outcome, other than something quite intangible, such as a particular kind of attitude. An attitude that he describes as “a sense of positive power,” that has led to

elimination of fear, of embarrassment, of constraint, of self-consciousness;
eliminated the conditions which created the feeling of failure and

incapacity. ... It included an ardent faith in human capacity. ... in the capacity of the environment to support worthwhile activities. (ibid., p. 140)

And, more importantly, what, for Dewey, can bring about this attitude that provides students with this “positive power,” are activities that are not directed at specific goals or outcomes. “[T]he whole concept of the school, of teachers and pupils and lessons,” he writes, “had so completely disappeared that when I asked after the special objectives of the activity of these centres, my Utopian friends thought I was asking why children should live at all, and therefore they did not take my questions seriously” (ibid., p. 138).

And he continues:

After I made them understand what I meant, my question was dismissed with the remark that since children were alive and growing, ‘of course, we, as the Utopians, try to make their lives worth while to them; of course, we try to see that they really do grow, that they really develop’. But as for having any objective beyond the process of a developing life, the idea still seemed to them quite silly. The notion that there was some special end which the young should try to attain was completely foreign to their thoughts. (ibid., p. 138)

And comparing the Utopians’ idea of education with ours, Dewey writes that “what we would regard as the fundamental purposes were thoroughly ingrained in the working of the activities themselves” (ibid., p. 138). Instead of operating based on the “concept of acquiring and storing away things,” he writes, such a concept “had been displaced by the

concept of creating attitudes by shaping desires and developing the needs that are significant in the process of living” (ibid., p. 139). And, finally:

In setting creation, productivity, over against acquiring, they said that there was no genuine production without enjoyment. They imagined that the ethics of education in the older period had been that enjoyment in education always had to be something deferred; that the motto of the schools, at least, was that man never is, but always is to be, blest: while the only education that really could discover and elicit power was one which brought these powers for immediate use and enjoyment. (ibid., pp. 139-140)

So here we have a powerful, non-utopian, or as Lewis would call it “weakly utopian” vision of education, namely the idea that what should be happening is not just a preparation for, but the *realization* of the great community, in the present, by engaging students in activities that involve the sharing of knowledge and skills, while being essentially (and primarily) about the process of communication and inquiry as an end in itself—a process where the enjoyment is not permanently deferred, but realized in the present. And, bringing in the idea of the experience of an empirical unity of opposites, we could say that it is that experience that underlies (and makes possible) this process of communication in the great community, and what accounts for “the attitude which would give a sense of positive power” (ibid., p. 140).

Based on these observations, it seems reasonable to suggest that P4I, and the experience it makes possible (in-fancy, ease), could very well be seen as a paradigm for

what Dewey describes as the kind of experience that forms the heart of the great community, and, at least in some of his writings, could be said to represent (or at least be compatible with) his idea of education in the great community, as not only a preparation, but the realization of a great community. And it may be in this sense that we should understand Dewey's famous dictum in "My Philosophical Creed" (Dewey, 1972) that "education ... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living," adding a little further down: "I believe that education which does not occur through forms of life, forms that are worth living for their own sake, is always a poor substitute for the genuine reality and tends to cramp and to deaden" (1972, p. 87). The practice of P4I, I believe, is very much in tune with this idea of education as consisting of "forms of life ... that are worth living for their own sake," and should thus be seen if not paradigmatic for Dewey's great community, then compatible with it—as a practice that should at least also be present in schools.

7.3.2. P4I as a paradigm in Rorty's *liberal utopia*. In his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), Rorty presents us with a model of a society as a "liberal utopia," made up of citizens he calls "liberal ironists." Like Dewey's great community, Rorty's model of an ideal society also contains the idea of communication as a defining feature. As I did for Dewey's great community, in the previous section, I intend to show in what sense P4I can also be seen as a paradigmatic practice in Rorty's liberal utopia.

While similar in many ways to Dewey's idea of the great community, Rorty places more emphasis on the role of language, and the experience of the contingency of language, in particular, as a key element of the kind of communication he sees as

constitutive for a truly democratic society. Referring here specifically to Dewey's discussion of the role of language and art in "Art and Experience" (mentioned in the previous section) to support his point, Rorty writes that the "poeticized culture of my liberal utopia" would no longer make a "claim of universal validity [as found, for example, in Habermas], a claim made implausible by the contingency of language. He continues:

Such a culture would instead agree with Dewey that 'imagination is the chief instrument of the good ... art is more moral than moralists. For the latter either are, or tend to become, consecrations of the status quo. ... The moral prophets of humanity have always been poets even though they spoke in free verse or by parable'.⁹¹ (1989, p. 69)

Rorty adopts here Dewey's idea that it is (ultimately) the creative use of language that allows for the experience of the contingency of language, turning the citizens of such as society into "liberal ironists." The difference between Rorty and Dewey is that while Dewey also emphasizes the role of language, for him it is not only about language, but rather about language as a way to articulate things, be it in science or art, making it an

⁹¹ "Habermas", he writes, "still wants to insist that 'the transcendent moment of universal validity bursts every provinciality asunder ... the validity laid claim to is distinguished from the social currency of a de facto established practice and yet serves it as the foundation of an existing consensus'" (ibid., pp. 68-69). And, contrasting his approach with that of Habermas: "Habermas sees my aestheticizing talk of metaphor, conceptual novelty, and self-invention as an unfortunate preoccupation with what he calls the 'world-disclosing function of language' as opposed to its 'problem-solving function' within 'intra-mundane praxis.' ... He wants world-disclosure always to be checked for 'validity' against intramundane practice. He wants there to be *argumentative* practices, conducted within 'expert cultures,' which cannot be overturned by exciting, romantic disclosures of new worlds" (ibid., p. 66).

instrument for a better, that is, more adequate way of describing reality. So the emphasis is clearly on description, given that for Rorty language is, in a certain sense, all there is.

The *liberal ironist* (whom Rorty sees as the ideal citizen in a *liberal utopia*), is someone who has embraced the idea of the contingency of language, while at the same time holding strong convictions about justice, such as the “hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease” (1989, p. xv). For Rorty, embracing these ideas is not a matter of trying to determine an existing foundation for such sentiments, rather, for him, such sentiments are themselves contingent. But insofar as some do in fact hold such beliefs, they may in fact choose to establish a sense of solidarity in their society. However, according to Rorty, this cannot be done with the help of theory, or philosophy, which is why, for him, philosophy, in a “liberal utopia,” is relegated to the private realm. This is because he believes that in “our increasingly ironist culture,” “philosophy has become more important for the pursuit of private perfection rather than for any social task” (*ibid.*, p. 94). And he adds that “ironist philosophers are private philosophers—philosophers concerned to intensify the irony of the nominalist and the historicist. . . . Their work is ill-suited to public purposes, of no use to liberals qua liberals” (*ibid.*, pp. 94-95). Literature in the liberal utopia, on the other hand, takes on an immanently public (social/political) role (which, as we will see, is also one of the reason why P4I may in fact be seen as a paradigm for the kind of public discourse Rorty envisions for his liberal utopia).

The role of literature in the liberal utopia has to do with a feature that Rorty considers essential for a democratic society, namely *solidarity*. Solidarity, for him, is not

something that already exists and just needs to be realized, or “discovered by reflection,” rather it is something that has to be brought about or created “by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people” (ibid., p. xvi). For Rorty, this happens at the level of language and discourse, and, for him, it is literature, in particular, that helps us get to know and understand “strange people as fellow sufferers” (ibid.). So, for him it is novelists, such as Nabokov, or Orwell, who can be “socially useful,” due to the fact that they can “help us attend to the springs of cruelty in ourselves, as well as to the fact of its occurrence in areas where we had not noticed it” (ibid., p. 95). For Rorty, this is about coming up with a “detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like, and of redescription of what we ourselves are like. This is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist’s report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially, the novel” (ibid., p. xvi). Which is also why, in his liberal utopia, literature, movies, TV programs, and so forth would play a much greater role.

For Rorty, what motivates all this, is “a general turn against theory and toward narrative” (ibid.), due to having abandoned “the attempt to hold all the sides of our life in a single vision, to describe them with a single vocabulary” (ibid.). In other words

a recognition of what ... I call the ‘contingency of language’—the fact that there is no way to step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of *all possible* vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling. (ibid., p. xvi)

For Rorty, the citizens of a liberal utopia, would have “a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community” (ibid., p. xx), and it is this sense of contingency that would allow them to be “people who combined commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment” (ibid., p. 61).

Coming here extremely close to expressing the idea of Lewis’ notion of weak utopianism, he describes the conversation at the center of his liberal utopia thus:

A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle ... for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. More important, it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth. (ibid., p. xvi)

Combing the two kinds of discourse, Rorty distinguishes (private and public), P4I could be said to serve as a paradigm in Rorty’s “liberal utopia” in two ways: First, it could be argued that what Rorty refers to as getting to know “strange people” through the sharing of experiences, is what is *also* happening in P4I—given that students share their experiences and ideas and, in the process, get to know what “unfamiliar sorts of people” are like. In other words, students experience, as they listen to each other’s contributions, the thick description that is characteristic of literature and ethnographies (telling each other stories about how they see the world, as it were). And, given that the teacher is not a higher authority in P4I, they experience each other’s contributions in the same way they

would reading a fictional story: not based on truth-conditions, but in their particularity (a particular person expressing a particular experience in a particular way, at a particular time)—which could be said to develop the sense of irony that according to Rorty strengthens the members of the liberal utopian in their recognition of the *plurality* of opinions, and contingency of the way each of us sees the world.

However, there is also another way in which P4I can be seen as a paradigm of Rorty's liberal utopia. This is because, in contrast to literature (that is, by definition, not about making factual statements about the world), in the conversation in P4I there is an intimation of truth simply because the conversation is being based on questions that seem to require answers (What is time? What is beauty?, and so forth). What accounts for the experience of the contingency of truth, and thus, language, is that the communal search for answers turns out to not lead to definite answers at all. But this can only happen if there is an intimation of truth. While reading literature can also have this effect, the conversation in P4I could be seen as privileged as a paradigm for discourse in Rorty's liberal utopia, insofar as it allows for the experience and recognition of the contingency of language (and truth), which Rorty sees as a prerequisite for adopting the view of the liberal ironist. In other words, the practice of P4I could be said to be not only an example (paradigm) for what Rorty calls private discourse (by philosophers, meant to "to intensify the irony of the nominalist and the historicist"), but also for the kind of discourse that uses a "vocabulary of justice," as a "medium for argumentative exchange" (ibid., p. xiv) that recognizes the limited validity of the convictions expressed in such a vocabulary.

In terms of what Rorty sees as the role of education in fostering the kind of dialogue that leads to a process of envisaging utopias as an “endless, proliferating realization of Freedom,” his view is that of a division of labor between secondary, and college education (Rorty, 1999). While he does indeed see the role of higher education as that of allowing for a realization of the kind of dialogue he considers crucial for a “liberal utopia,” he believes that pre-college education should focus on socialization and acculturation, to ensure that students acquire the necessary basis or foundation, before engaging in questioning that basis, and go beyond it, in college. He writes, for example:

There is only the shaping of an animal into a human being by a process of socialization, followed (with luck) by the self-individualization and self-creation of that human being through his or her own later revolt against that very process. (ibid., p. 118)

The role of “non-vocational higher education,” on the other hand, is “to help students realize that they can reshape themselves—that they can rework the self-image foisted on them by their past, the self-image that makes them competent citizens, into a new self-image that they themselves have helped to create” (ibid.). And he continues, emphasizing the role of pre-college education as a preparation for higher education even further:

Primary and secondary education will always be a matter of familiarizing the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not. It is not, and never will be, the function of lower-level education to challenge the prevailing consensus about what is true. Socialization has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before

some constraints have been imposed. But, for quite different reasons, non-vocational higher education is also not a matter of inculcating or educating truth. It is, instead, a matter of inciting doubt and stimulating imagination, thereby challenging the prevailing consensus. If pre-college education produces literate citizens and college education produces self-creating individuals, then questions about whether students are being taught the truth can safely be neglected. (ibid., p. 118)

Consistent with this kind of view, he writes that: “It would be well for colleges to remind us that 19 is an age when young people should have finished absorbing the best that has been thought and said and should have started becoming suspicious of it” (ibid., p. 124). The question is of course whether 19 is indeed an age when young people should begin to become suspicious of the knowledge they absorbed until then. On what basis should they do this, without having already developed the ability to question what they were being taught?

However problematic this idea of pre-college education may be, the point is that Rorty seems to see what happens in college as crucial for the conversation in a liberal utopia, and all we need to do is to propose that this should be done earlier. The point is that, as is the case in colleges and universities, it is not about replacing more directional, or vocational aspects of education, but about introducing students in pre-college education to a non-vocational form of life that includes the kind of practices Rorty himself sees as playing a crucial role in his ideal model of a society, without therefore

undermining the socialization or acculturation process. As he speaks of “non-vocational higher education,” we can speak of “non-vocational pre-college education.”

An additional point we can make is that insofar as the kind of open-ended discourse is already part of our society and culture, it could be seen as an important (if not the most important) aspect of the socialization and acculturation of the young in the kind of democratic society Rorty envisions. Here we may refer, more specifically, to what Rorty calls antiauthoritarian philosophy, and its history in democratic society. He writes:

I think that the denial that anything has an intrinsic nature independent of our choice of description, the pragmatist claim that truth is not a matter of corresponding to any such intrinsic nature, the Habermasian claim that reason should be viewed dialogically, and the so-called 'death of the subject' are all parts of the same antiauthoritarian philosophical movement. ... The reason this kind of philosophy is relevant to politics is simply that it encourages people to have a self-image in which their real or imagined citizenship in a democratic republic is central. This kind of anti-authoritarian philosophy helps people set aside religious and ethnic identities in favour of an image of themselves as part of a great human adventure, one carried out on a global scale. This kind of philosophy, so to speak, clears philosophy out of the way in order to let the imagination play upon the possibilities of a utopian future. (1999, pp. 238-239)

Based on this passage, it seems to make a lot of sense, to let students engage in the kind of practice that allows them to “let the imagination play upon the possibilities of a utopian future,” and where “the idea of truth as correspondence to reality might gradually be replaced by the idea of truth as what comes to be believed in the course of free and open encounters”⁹²

Ultimately, we can say that what Rorty is describing here is very much in line with the practice of P4I, and, again, there seems to be no reason to believe that this should not be done at the secondary level, in addition to (and without impeding or undermining) the vocational aspects of education. But insofar as there is a directional element in both Dewey’s and Rorty’s views—if not in their social or political views, than in their views of education—I will now turn to considering P4I as a paradigm in Agamben’s *Coming Community*, as a way to think of the role of P4I as an educational practice in society in radically non directional terms.

7.3.3. P4I as a paradigm in Agamben’s *coming community*. In this section, finally, I will look at how P4I can be seen (not surprisingly) as a paradigm of the politics in Agamben’s coming community. My point here is not to show how Agamben’s notion of the coming community is somehow better than those of Dewey and Rorty, but how his

⁹² The full quote reads: “I should like to replace both religious and philosophical accounts of a suprahistorical ground or an end-of-history convergence with a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs—the institutions and customs which were designed to diminish cruelty, make possible government by the consent of the governed, and permit as much domination-free communication as possible to take place. Such a narrative would clarify the conditions in which the idea of truth as correspondence to reality might gradually be replaced by the idea of truth as what comes to be believed in the course of free and open encounters. This shift from epistemology to politics, from an explanation of the relation between ‘reason’ and reality to an explanation of how political freedom has changed our sense of what human inquiry is good for, is a shift which Dewey was willing to make but from which Habermas hangs back” (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pp. 68-69).

conceptual framework allows us to more fully realize ideas that are already contained in Dewey and Rorty. In the same way as in-fancy can be found in conceptions of the practice of philosophy, and in certain conceptions of education, a notion of politics based on the idea of in-fancy can, as I tried to show in the previous sections, also be found in Dewey's and Rorty's political thought. What we can say then is that Agamben's notion of the political aligns most closely with the idea of P4I as a paradigm of the kind of (communicative) practice Agamben sees as constitutive for politics in a coming community.

Similar to Dewey and Rorty, Agamben thinks of society and politics not in terms of government and political structures, but in terms of a certain type of communication. As is the case for Dewey and Rorty, what is central to his idea of the political is an open-ended process of communication that is not directed at any pre-conceived goals or outcomes, but instead is about allowing for an experience of openness with regard to the use of language (potentiality of language) that allows for the articulation and sharing of ideas that diverge from established ways of speaking and thinking (for its own sake). The differences between Dewey and Rorty, and Agamben, have mostly to do with the role of language in this process, and the degree of directionality. Like Rorty (and unlike Dewey) Agamben emphasizes the role of language, and the centrality of the contingency of language to the kind of communication he sees as constitutive for politics in a coming community. On the other hand, similar to Dewey (and unlike Rorty), he sees a state of indistinguishability of language and not-language as crucial for the possibility of new ways of thinking and speaking. So we could say that both Agamben and Dewey assume

an ontologically more basic dimension where language and not-language are not (yet) distinguished, only that for Agamben this experience is only possible within language (on the very threshold between not language and language, not outside of language).

To understand how P4I can be seen as a paradigm for Agamben's idea of the political, we need to look at what Agamben sees as the key to politics in a coming community. For Agamben, it is two concepts, in particular, that are central for an understanding of his political thought: *bare or naked life*, and *form of life*. For Agamben, both play a crucial role in the constitution of sovereignty in regular politics, and for the mechanisms that constitute politics. The key ideas for his understanding (and critique) of the paradigm of politics in the West, are developed in a series of books, beginning with *Homo Sacer* (1998), and ending with *The Use of Bodies* (2016). As we have already seen (chapter 6), for Agamben, the "sovereign decision" constitutes all forms of power and sovereignty. It refers to the power of the sovereign to declare a state of exception (to suspend the law)—which places him or her both inside and outside of the law. Corresponding to the marginal figure of the sovereign, on the other end of the equation of power, is what he calls "bare life." "Bare life" (represented by the figure of *Homo Sacer*) is equally marginal, in that it stands for whatever it is that is included in the law as that which needs to be excluded. Speaking loosely, we could say that bare life is anything (or anyone) that is un-formed, in relation to a particular matrix (the law, politics, or education, for that matter), so that it is included in that matrix, as that which is excluded—its only form being that it doesn't have a form.

Given that it is the division between sovereign and bare life that constitutes all forms of power, Agamben believes that as long as we think of bare life, and forms of life as separate, we cannot overcome sovereignty based on the exclusion of pure life (with all the bad consequences he sees with this model). For him, the way to overcome this paradigm of power, is to be able to think bare life and form of life not as separate, but as inseparable. *Form-of-life* is life that cannot be separated from its form, that is, it is nothing else than its form. In other words, form-of-life is not first unformed life (life as such, nude life), that, then, is given, or takes on, a certain form, but it is life, as the form that it happens to have, that is, *whatever* its form is. In *Means without End* (2000), Agamben writes:

'Form-of-Life' defines a life, human life, that is, life that cannot be separated from its form. [I]n [it] the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power ... [it] retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. (ibid., p. 4)

"Political power (as we know it!)," Agamben writes, "is founded on the separation of naked life from the context of forms of life" (ibid.), and the subsequent revocation of naked life. And: "Life ... that has now become the norm—is the naked life that in every context separates the forms of life from their cohering into a form-of-life" (ibid., p. 6).

And, finally:

[B]iological life remains inviolate in such forms as that obscure threat that can suddenly actualize itself in violence, in extraneousness, in illness, in

accidents. It is the invisible sovereign that stares at us behind the dull-witted masks of the powerful who, whether or not they realize it, govern us in its name. (ibid., p. 8)

For Agamben, what is at stake here, is nothing less than the possibility of human happiness, a “happy life,” which, for him, makes this an inherently political issue, given that, quoting Marsilius of Padua: “The state is a community instituted for the sake of the living and the well living of men in it” (ibid., p. 4). For him, the “well living” of men in a community can only be ensured if we can overcome the separation of naked life from forms of life. For Agamben, political life (used emphatically here) “is thinkable only starting from the emancipation from such a division, with the irrevocable exodus from any sovereignty. The question about the possibility of a nonstatist politics necessarily takes this form: Is today something like a form-of-life, a life for which living itself would be at stake in its own living, possible? Is today a *life of power* available?”

To understand what this might mean more specifically, and how P4I could be seen as an example (or paradigm) of form-of-life (and, thus, as a paradigm for what Agamben refers to as a coming politics), I want to look at his description of form-of-life as it relates to language and thought. What makes form-of-life possible, according to Agamben, is “thought,” by which he means “the nexus that constitutes the forms of life in an inseparable context as form-of-life,” insofar as it is “an experience, an *experimentum* that has as its object the potential character of life and of human intelligence” (ibid., p. 9). And he continues:

To think does not mean merely to be affected by this or that thing, by this or that content of enacted thought, but rather at once to be affected by one's own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought a pure power of thinking. (ibid.)

And:

Only if I am not always already and solely enacted, but rather delivered to a possibility and a power, only if living and intending and apprehending themselves are at stake each time in what I live and intend and apprehend—only if, in other words, there is thought—only then can a form of life become, in its own factness and thingness, *form-of-life*, in which it is never possible to isolate something like naked life. (ibid.)

While he doesn't state it here explicitly, what he means with "an experimentum that has as its object the potential character of life and of human intelligence," is an "experimentum linguae." And as such, what he refers to as intellectuality and thought, is, like language, inherently communal. And insofar as, for Agamben, these constitute/make possible form-of-life (life that is not separated from naked life), it is also responsible for what makes coming politics (that is, politics in a coming community) possible. (Experience of thought, for Agamben, is always experience of a "common power.")

So, we can now say that, for Agamben, coming politics is about a community of beings that are not enacted (relate to each other as whatever beings) due to the experience of in-fancy that is the potentiality of language that makes possible intellectuality and thought. Agamben sees this as the realization of a form-of-life, or a way to overcome

“politics as we know it.” For him, what “any communication (as Benjamin perceives for language) is first of all communication not of something in common but of communicability itself” (2000, p. 10). In other words we are connecting at the level of our ability to speak. He then goes on to talk about intellectuality and thought, as

not a form of life among others in which life and social production articulate themselves, but they are *rather the unitary power that constitutes the multiple forms of life as form-of-life*. ... They [intellectuality and thought] are the power that incessantly reunites life to its form or prevents it from being dissociated from its form. (ibid., p.11)

He speaks here of “intellectuality as antagonistic power and form-of-life,” and, elaborating on this idea, adds:

Thought is form-of-life, life that cannot be segregated from its form; and anywhere the intimacy of this inseparable life appears, in the materiality of corporeal processes and of habitual ways of life no less than in theory, there and only there is there thought. And it is this thought, this form-of-life, that, abandoning naked life to ‘Man’ and to the ‘Citizen,’ who clothe it temporarily and represent it with their ‘rights,’ must become the guiding concept and the unitary center of the coming politics. (ibid., pp. 11-12)

So insofar as the conversation in P4I is an experience of communicability itself, among whatever beings, who experience themselves and each other in a state of infancy (potentiality of language), it is basically a communal form of thinking (intellectuality and thought). And insofar as this is, for Agamben, also the basis for politics in a coming

community (political well-being), P4I can be seen as a paradigm for the coming politics (“coming” is used here in the sense of “being in a state/process of coming,” not in the sense of “coming in the future”).

And insofar as Agamben considers, as we have already seen, happiness and the well-being of people as the ultimate goal (of the state, and society), it is also in this regard that P4I can be seen as paradigmatic for the kind of practice that can realize what he calls, in *Means without End* (2000), the “happy life.” For Agamben, “the problem of the new politics” is encapsulated in the question: “[I]s it possible to have a *political* community that is ordered exclusively for the full enjoyment of worldly life?” (ibid., p. 114), adding: “But, if we look closer, isn’t this precisely the goal of philosophy?” (ibid.).

And he continues:

The ‘happy life’ on which political philosophy should be founded ... cannot be either the naked life that sovereignty posits as a presupposition so as to turn it into its own subject or the impenetrable extraneity of science and of modern biopolitics that everybody today tries in vain to sacralize. This ‘happy life’ should be, rather, an absolutely profane ‘sufficient life’ that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability—a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold. (ibid., pp. 114-115)

As we have already seen in our discussion of the role of ease and love in the P4I-community, it is individual and communal well-being that constitutes the use of P4I at the classroom level, and a shared love of the world, at the school level, that allows us to

see P4I as a (radically inoperative) form of educational life that is about the realization (paradigm, example) of the “happy life”—not preparation for it—as what can replace politics as we know it. What makes this so urgent, is that, for Agamben, what is already happening, is a process of dissolution of meaning, and that only acknowledging this, and using it as an opportunity to turn it into power (of language, community, love), can save us, writing:

Contemporary politics is precisely this devastating *experimentum linguae* that disarticulates and empties, all over the planet, traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities. Only those who will be able to carry it to completion—without allowing that which reveals to be veiled in the nothingness it reveals, but bringing language itself to language—will become the first citizens of a community with neither presuppositions nor the state. (ibid., p. 85)

What this will make possible, and what, according to Agamben, “the state cannot tolerate in any way,” is the formation of communities that are made of singularities (like P4I), that is, communities that are not “claiming an identity,” communities in which “human beings co-belong without a representable condition of belonging (being Italian, working-class, Catholic, terrorist, etc.)” (ibid., p. 87). And the reason such communities are such a threat to the state, for Agamben, is that they show that

the unrepresentable should exist and form a community without either presuppositions or conditions of belonging. ... The whatever singularity—this singularity that wants to take possession of belonging itself as well as

of its own being-into-language, and that thus declines any identity and any condition of belonging—is the new, nonsubjective, and socially inconsistent protagonist of the coming politics. (ibid., p. 89)

In “What is a Destituent Power?” (2014), and especially in the last volume of his *Homo Sacer*-series (*The Use of Bodies*, 2016), Agamben develops more fully what it may mean to allow for form-of-life to be realized in society as a paradigm. According to Agamben, “destituent power” is neither constitutive, nor constituent. Instead, it is a kind of power that can be carried out only in a form-of-life, meaning: “Only a form-of-life is constitutively destituent” (2014, p. 72). By which he means that it operates in a very different way than traditional power: It operates through the changing of a way of being that derives its potency through its relationship to what it is not. In other words, what he calls “modal ontology” allows us to rethink “from the start the problem of the relation between potentiality and act” (ibid., p. 73). And he continues: “The modification of being [modal ontology] is not an operation in which something passes from potentiality to act, and realizes and exhausts itself in this. What deactivates operativity in a form-of-life is an experience of potentiality or habit, it is the habitual use of a potentiality that manifests itself as power of not” (ibid.). So, basically, P4I is a paradigm for a form-of-life, for thinking without presuppositions and truth-conditions, which is a paradigm for the kind of politics that “brings language to language” and that can realize the kind of practice that has the potentiality to hold off what Agamben refers to as the “devastating *experimentum linguae* that disarticulates and empties, all over the planet, traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities” (ibid., p. 85).

7.4. Summary

What I tried to do in this final chapter is to extent the various lines developed in the previous chapters of this dissertation, to try to articulate the use of the practice of P4I in schools, and society. To show how this can be done without thinking of the practice in an instrumental way, I used Agamben's notion of *paradigm*, *form-of-life*, and *use*, to show how we can think of P4I as a practice that makes possible the experience of a state of individual and communal well-being. I used Lewis' notion of the notch, and Masschelein and Simons' idea of teaching as sharing the love of one's world, as ways to illustrate what this might mean more specifically, at the level of the school. I then considered how P4I could be seen as a paradigm in conceptions of society (Dewey's great community, Rorty's liberal utopia, and Agamben's coming community). While the first two models (Dewey's, and Rorty's) can be read in such a way as to make them compatible with P4I as paradigm, Agamben's coming community aligns most fully with the idea of P4I as a paradigm for society.

Concluding Thoughts

I want to conclude with some general thoughts on the overall relevance, and applicability of the ideas presented here. What I intend to achieve with my dissertation is to articulate what I see as a defining feature of philosophy with children, and its unique use in education. Applying Agamben's notion of in-fancy to philosophy with children, doesn't just add another possible conceptualization of philosophy with children, but identifies a constitutive element in the very idea of the practice of philosophy. As such, it can be seen as a common denominator in various practices and approaches of philosophy in education. As I have argued, many of the basic procedures of the traditional P4C-approach (procedural rules, dialogue, etc.) are not only compatible with, but are indeed necessary to allow for the experience of in-fancy. Rather than looking for a completely different kind of practice, I believe that all that is needed to make more traditional approaches (such as the original P4C-approach) compatible with P4I, is a relatively slight shift—away from the idea that the task of the teacher is to *actively* move the conversation toward more reasonable speech. Slight, because even without active facilitation by the teacher, the conversation tends to move toward more reasonable speech through self-correction, and it may even do so more effectively. What is gained, on the other hand, is the inclusion of a practice that can be seen as a paradigm for a radically different, and inherently desirable form of educational, social, and political life.

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